

HighCountryNews



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secession movement

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coastal Alaska

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Shana Olson, field biologist for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, helps prepare a captive-born wolf pup before its introduction into a wild wolf den. **Gabriela Campos / HCN**

Know the West.

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Practice vigilance

I SPENT A LITTLE TIME in the wilderness recently — just a two-nighter to rest the mind and let the animal body do its thing. The pleasure of being on my own time and no one else's washed over me as I adjusted to the freedom of the backcountry. There'd normally be very little water where I went, but California's unusually wet winter — one atmospheric river after another — bestowed on our creeks and rivers more water than usual, and wildflower season was still in fine form.

You'd think a wet winter would mean a break from the threat of fire, but it can actually cut both ways: More rain brings more vegetation growth, which turns to tinder when the temperatures rise, as they have done and will continue to do. And when the Santa Ana winds kick up, there are no guarantees. The last time I took my son and his friends camping, I chose a place in the Southern Sierra with two exit routes: a road leading north and one leading south. (This was three years after the Camp Fire swept through Paradise.) We camped on the edge of a massive burn left by the Castle Fire of 2020, which torched 175,000 acres and killed an estimated 10% of the world's sequoia trees. Groves I'd hoped to visit were inaccessible due to area closures, and some had been nearly obliterated. That was in August of 2021. Just two months later, the Windy Fire burned 97,000 acres of the remaining forest, including the famous Trail of 100 Giants.

Two summers earlier, when the Eastern Sierra was ablaze, we canceled a trip there and went to the coastal redwoods instead. But that area also caught fire the summer after our visit; 97% of Big Basin Redwoods State Park burned in 2020's CZU Lightning Complex Fire. I have lain awake in my tent in the middle of the night, wondering if a fire is about to roar over the ridge and force me to flee. Perhaps you have, too. Longtime hikers Matt Bishop and Steve Cooper were both comfortable in and knowledgeable about the woods. Nevertheless, they ended up in fire's way. Their harrowing story, told by Kylie Mohr in this issue of *High Country News* (page 26), is a warning: The rules of recreating in a warming and unpredictable climate have changed, and they will continue to change.

This is what hiking and camping look like in the age of fires too hot or massive to be controlled. Practice vigilance in the backcountry. Heed warnings. Stay safe out there!

Jennifer Sahn, editor-in-chief

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ON THE COVER

Burned-over forest in Washington near the origin of the Bolt Creek Fire, with Eagle Rock on the right and Townsend Mountain in the distance.

Peter Bohler / HCN

Hikers fleeing from a nearby peak watch the Bolt Creek Fire burn up the backside of Washington's Baring Mountain.
Courtesy of Alison Dempsey-Hall



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LETTERS

High Country News is dedicated to independent journalism, informed debate and discourse in the public interest. We welcome letters through digital media and the post. Send us a letter, find us on social media, or email us at editor@hcn.org.

HCN + PROPUBLICA = GREAT JOURNALISM!

I have been a cover-to-cover reader for over 30 years, and I must say that “Waiting for Water” (July 2023) with four feature articles written with *ProPublica* is maybe the best journalism you have ever published. I had no idea of the extent of the machinations that Arizona has gone to, to prevent Arizona tribes from gaining access to water that is rightfully theirs. I have never seen all these details anywhere else. May this collaboration continue.

Jeff Sussmann
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Just thought I would drop you a note to congratulate the reporters, writers and staff who brought the July issue to fruition. I especially found noteworthy the “Waiting for Water” series, which I hope is not another *Waiting for Godot*.

Richard Estock
Colonia, New Jersey

RED DESERT REVEL

To my delight, I ran across your article in *HCN*, “Horse girls” (July 2023).

I spent a couple of glorious summers in the mid-’70s working on a wildlife crew for the Bureau of Land Management out of the Lander, Wyoming, office. I spent many days exploring the Red Desert. Both in the desert and the other sage steppe areas I frequented, wild horse bands were ever-present. Then, as now, the wild horse population was a hot topic. Those two summers helped launch a 40-plus year career in conservation. So, I might have just a little clue how the writer’s encounters there impacted her career.

I was pleased to see that Nina McConigley simply observed and enjoyed her encounters. And the real purpose of noting her horse encounter was to set the stage for the thoughts focused on her daughter.

I was touched that she hoped that her daughter’s wild-

ness would never be broken, and I truly enjoyed the article.

Greg Wingfield
Cedar Point, Kansas

LETITIA’S STRONG LEGACY

Thank you so much for publishing the article about Letitia Carson (“The Many Legacies of Letitia Carson” June 2023).

Her intelligence, persistence and strength were amazing. It is good to know that her story was not lost and that something is being done at Oregon State University to give her recognition as being one of the main reasons that OSU exists. Her strong relationship with the land and sense of place are an important part of the history of the Pacific Northwest. The fact that an Indigenous culture became part of her descendants’ family makes the efforts to honor her more complex, but also shows how our country has evolved. It is not unlike the interrelationships found within the natural ecosystems around us.

Susanne Twight-Alexander
Eugene, Oregon

As a longtime *HCN* subscriber who lives less than two miles from the Oregon homestead of Black pioneer Letitia Carson, and who has supported efforts to restore her legacy, I was very happy to see Jaclyn Moyer’s article.

But I was surprised how the article and the accompanying photographs avoided the massive landfill near Letitia Carson’s homestead, run by the out-of-state waste giant, Republic Services.

When I met Shantae Johnson and her partner, Arthur Shavers, at an event last year, I learned that their vision was to create a space for Black farmers, including Black organic farmers, to learn farming methods on

this historic landscape. Having a landfill company that wants to expand so close to Letitia Carson’s homestead is a problem for that vision.

We cannot fix the injustices of the past if we ignore what is happening now.

Joel Geier
Corvallis, Oregon

DELIGHT ILLUSTRATED

The artist Xulin deserves praise for their delightful illustration in Maya Kapoor’s article about the elusive Canada lynx in the June 2023 issue (“Where the wildcats go”). I love that *HCN* supports working artists and photographers along with reporters and designers.

Linda Paul
Boise, Idaho

REPRESENTATION THAT RIPPLES

Being featured in your May 2023 “I am the West” has had a ripple effect. I have been receiving notes from across Indian Country about the positive representation. I have heard from everyone from environmental law professors to the former assistant secretary of the Interior to librarians, all pleased about the back cover of *High Country News*.

As a tribal attorney for a decade for the Spokane Tribe and a tribal court judge for multiple tribes, I can share that tribes are working hard to reintroduce salmon, purchase land for conservation and prevent development in critical habitat areas. It is nice to have positive representation on such a well-known magazine.

Margo Hill
Associate professor,
Department of Political
Science and Public Policy
Eastern Washington
University, Spokane,
Washington

CORRECTION

In our July “Heard Around the West” column, we said that Jonathan Evison found a baby bear “near his cabin on Bainbridge Island” in Washington. In fact, both Evison’s cabin and the bear cub were located in the Olympic foothills of Clallam County, which is where he was hiking. We would like to blame plate tectonics for our geographical confusion, but in any case, we regret the error.

Smell matters

Scent is the key to getting wild wolf packs to accept and foster captive-bred pups.

BY CECILIA NOWELL
PHOTOS BY
GABRIELA CAMPOS

EARLY ONE MORNING this spring, veterinary techs at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo bundled a litter of 9-day-old Mexican wolf pups (*Canis lupus baileyi*) — each weighing just under two pounds — into a cloth carrier. The sleeping pups were then loaded onto a small private plane: Three would go to southeast Arizona, and three to New Mexico's Gila National Forest, where U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists had recently located the den of AF1578, a 6-year-old female lobo they identified as an ideal foster mother.

Just days earlier, AF1578 had given birth to a wild litter. Now, deep in the Gila, scientists carrying three pups approached her den, and their sounds were enough to spook AF1578 into temporarily fleeing. The scientists moved in, wearing gloves and long-sleeves to minimize the chance that their human smell would linger. They put the captive-born, microchipped pups in with their new wild-born foster siblings. It was essential



that all the pups smell alike, so, before leaving, they coated the foster and wild pups in each other's scents — a critical step that required a small amount of the puppies' urine. A uniform scent increased the chances that AF1578 would accept the new additions as her own.

From a hiding spot in the piñon and juniper, a wolf re-

leased a howl that echoed across the woodland and then faded into a whistle on the wind. *Mama sounds upset*, the team mused. *Time to go.* Now, the fate of those captive-born wolves would depend on AF1578's maternal instincts — whether she'd be able to parent all the pups in the den, including the ones she hadn't given birth to.

Wild wolf pups, about 6 days old, are removed from their den as part of a wild-to-wild cross-foster (top). Elin Crockett, a veterinarian with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and Susan Dicks, a veterinarian with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, prepare the wolf pups for their introduction into a wolf den in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico (bottom).

THIS SPRING marked 25 years of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts to revitalize endangered Mexican wolf populations in the U.S. It's also the eighth year that the agency has introduced captive-born wolf pups into wild dens in a "cross-fostering" program. It's a strategy that depends on unseen variables — postpartum hormones and pheromones. "We found this little lever in their life history and their biology," said Susan Dicks, a Fish and Wildlife veterinarian. The "hormone soup" of the early maternal time is powerful, she said. "They just can't resist pups."

By the 1970s, Mexican wolves in the Southwest were nearly extinct. The early 20th century was

Jay Olson and Elin Crockett return from the wild wolf den after delivering three captive-born pups for introduction into the litter and extracting three wild pups to be moved into another wild den.

notable for its profound hostility toward predators in general; ranchers hired trappers to kill any wolves that might threaten their livestock, and the federal government even sponsored programs to incentivize killings. Then, in 1973, the Endangered Species Act passed, and, in 1976, Mexican wolves were listed as a protected species. It wasn't until 1998, however, that the wildlife agency introduced captive-bred Mexican wolves to the wild. By the end of 2022, the population in Arizona and New Mexico had grown to at least 241, according to the agency.

Previous releases of family groups into historic lobo range were met with anger by local ranchers; between 1998 and 2022, more than 130 Mexican wolves were killed, according to the Sierra Club. In 2016, Fish and Wildlife began its cross-fostering program, hoping that it would lead to greater public tol-

erance — and eventually more wolves. Although there are still human-caused wolf killings each year, Aislinn Maestas, a spokeswoman for the agency, said it's easier to convince ranchers to accept new pups in an already established pack than an entire new family that requires new territory to roam. This year, 16 pups were fostered into the wild, bringing the total number released under the program to 99. The agency hopes the wild wolves will pass their knowledge on to the captive-bred pups, while the newcomers introduce valuable genetic diversity into the population.

Quantifying the program's success, though, is a challenge. Wolf pups can't be tracked with a collar — they're too small, Maestas said. But Fish and Wildlife has so far confirmed that 14 of the 83 captive-born pups released between 2016 and 2022 survived to breeding age. The

agency estimates that 50% of the captive-born pups released each year survive for at least a year, a mortality rate consistent with that of their wild-born siblings. Based on gene-monitoring data, the agency says the program has begun to stabilize — and in some cases slightly improve — the gene pool since its lowest point in 2018.

But advocates at the Center for Biological Diversity interpret the numbers differently: They say that cross-fostering hasn't improved the gene pool enough to matter. Today's lobos are as genetically related as siblings, said Michael Robinson, a senior conservation advocate at the center. He and his colleagues want Fish and Wildlife to go back to releasing well-bonded family packs, which they believe would improve survival and genetic diversity. In a related fight, the group sued the agency in 2022, alongside Defenders of Wildlife, challenging the standards it uses to define the lobo's recovery.

On the Gila National Forest this spring, when the scientists placed the new foster pups in the den with their new wild siblings, they took three of the wild-born pups with them. That way, the new mother wouldn't be burdened with extra mouths to feed, and her pups' genetics could be introduced into other wild packs. They hiked back to the trailhead, toting the three pups in the cloth carrier, taking them to a new den and another mother. As the scientists' footsteps faded away, they hoped that AF1578 — herself a cross-foster who grew up in the wild — would return to her den and embrace both sets of pups, the captive-born foster babies and her own natal offspring. And, eventually, lead them all into the wild. ☀





The Dixie Red Hills golf course was the first to arrive in St. George in 1965. Now, there are 14 in this remote corner of southwest Utah, drinking up 13% of the municipal water supply.

REPORTAGE

A putter's paradise with a water problem

In the Utah desert, can golf justify itself?

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY SAMUEL SHAW

ON A SWELTERING LATE APRIL DAY, a flock of middle-aged men strolled in leisure, practicing their backswings and rifling balls into the azure sky above the Green Springs golf community just outside St. George, a ballooning city of 100,000 in southwestern Utah. Some 2,000 homes, mostly single-family — many with RV garages — orbit the fairway, like rings around Planet Golf, and more are on their way.

As in so many cities in the desert West, golf in St. George is a thirsty business, with a powerful lobby and a relationship with water painted in green on the landscape. Among its peers, however, St. George is in a league of its own. Few cities in the Southwest use more water per person: nearly 300 gallons a day. And a hefty portion of that, over half, goes to keeping ornamental grass, lawns and golf courses lush in an arid region where water supplies are dwindling every day. Within a decade, and without immediate action to conserve, local officials predict that its water

shortage will become a water crisis.

Utah is notorious for granting an unusual degree of grace to this sort of profligate water use. That may be changing, however, at least when it comes to the golf industry: In 2022, the city of Ivins, an exurb of St. George, effectively banned the construction of new golf courses, while early this year, state Rep. Douglas Welton, R, introduced House Bill 188, which could require golf courses to be more transparent about how much water they use.

In a city and at a time where something's gotta give, will golf be the first to fall?

MINUTES DOWN THE ROAD from the Green Springs community, at the Dixie Red Hills Golf Course, I joined a group of older players staging behind the first tee. Before we settled on the griddle-hot pleather of our golf carts, Jim Peacock, 80, slapped a top-spinning rocket up and over the rough that his friend Craig Felt, two years his senior, couldn't help but admire. "Jim's the athlete of

the group,” Felt said. Soon, the chatter moved to water. “When I was in Mexico, there was only enough water for three flushes. That could happen to us if we don’t pay attention,” Felt said. While Tom Smith, 75, indicated that he’d rather give up golf than toilet-flushing, it’s not clear that the rest of the community is so inclined. “This is a place where a lot of people do a lot of golfing,” Greg Milne said, gesturing toward the sprawl of St. George.

This area’s mingling of desert and water has long attracted people. Southern Paiute bands lived near the Virgin River for a millennium or more before Mormon colonists arrived in the late 1850s, intent on making “Utah’s Dixie” bloom with cotton. For the next century, Washington County remained “a sleepy little community off the I-15 that people would pass by on their way to California,” said Colby Cowan, director of golf operations for the city of St. George. Throughout the 1950s, nuclear blasts at Nevada’s Yucca Flats test range blew radioactive dust onto the homes of the city’s 5,000 residents — dust that stubbornly clung to the valley’s reputation.

But in 1965, St. George unveiled the nine-hole Dixie Red Hills course, rebranding the Mormon Downwinder outpost as a putter’s paradise. “That’s how it started. The course was built as a sort of vision for growth in the area,” said Cowan. Since then, golf’s role in the regional recreation economy

has burgeoned. The 14 golf courses in Washington County, including four owned by the city of St. George, attract nearly 600,000 visitors a year, generating \$130 million dollars annually, according to Cowan. That puts golf on par with mining, quarrying, and oil and gas industries in the area, though still below the half-billion dollars generated annually by Zion National Park.

And, like those other industries, golf has political sway. When golf’s water needs came under fire in Washington County in 2021 and again in the state Legislature this January, the industry flexed its influence. Golf Alliance Utah, the lobbying wing of the Utah Golf Association, pulled strings at the Statehouse in Salt Lake City, killing the bill even after sponsors dropped the annual reporting requirement, arguing that it unfairly targeted the sport.

Generally, the golf industry tries to burnish its image by touting its economic benefits and highlighting its efforts to decrease water use. “We’re doing our due diligence with water conservation,” Devin Dehlin, the executive director at the Utah Section Professional Golf Association, said in a call with *High Country News*. “What the sport brings economic-wise is the story we want to tell.” In practice, those changes have come down to encouraging course operators to replace some turf with native plants. Other technologies, like soil-moisture

monitoring and artificial grass coloring, which gives turf a deep green appearance with minimal watering, are being adopted, though strictly on a voluntary basis. Dehlin said his organization does not track how widespread these changes are.

OF THE 10 THIRSTIEST golf courses in Utah, seven are in Washington County, according to an investigation by the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Some privately owned courses, including Coral Canyon Golf Course and SunRiver Golf Club, actually increased their water use between 2018 and 2022. The mercury tops 100 degrees Fahrenheit here more than 50 days each year, so it takes an exorbitant amount of water to keep the fairways lush year-round: about 177 million gallons annually for each course, or roughly eight times the national average. And if the region continues to grow at its current breakneck rate, existing water supplies — from wells, springs and the Virgin River — will be severely strained. That prospect has some local and state officials backing a proposed pipeline that would carry Colorado River water from the ever-shrinking Lake Powell to this corner of the Utah desert. With or without the pipeline, the region is likely to face severe water rationing, with golf and lawns likely seeing the first cuts. Washington County’s forthcoming drought contingency plan could require cities to cut their water use by up to 30% in a worst-case scenario. “And if you look about where they would cut their water usage,” said Washington County Water Conservancy District Manager Zach Renstrom, “it really would come to large grassy areas, such as golf.”

In a bid to avoid future mandated cuts, St. George is scrambling to reduce its water use now. Under Renstrom’s guidance, the city passed sweeping conservation ordinances early this year — the toughest in Utah, but still mild compared to those in Las Vegas. Three of the four city-owned golf courses now use treated wastewater for irrigation rather than potable or “culinary” grade water. Las Vegas shifted to reused water for the majority of its courses by 2008. Cowan said the city-owned courses are beginning to remove ornamental grass from non-play areas. So far this year, the county has removed more than 264,000 square feet of grass. While that may sound like a lot, it’s only about six acres across the entire county, or roughly 4% of one local golf course. Even with



An unattended sprinkler by the Green Spring Golf Course builds a mud bath where a future home will be. St. George, the hottest and driest city in the state of Utah, teeters on a water crisis.

those measures in place, Renstom says the halcyon days for golf in southwestern Utah need to end: “I’ve had a couple of developers come to me recently and want to talk about golf courses, and I flat-out said, ‘I won’t provide the water.’”

For now, though, the county still has some water to spare. St. George has secured \$60 million for a wastewater treatment plant, all while stashing almost two years of reserves in a network of reservoirs. “We have a lot of water stored away,” said Ed Andrechak, water program manager for Conserve Southwest Utah, a sustainability advocacy nonprofit. If the county enforced the strict conservation rules that Las Vegas has, he believes it could grow at the blistering pace it’s projected to over the coming years.

But Andrechak worries that, ultimately, a culture of profligacy will be the barrier to conservation, not money or technical know-how: “We just don’t think water rules apply to us here,” he said. Andrechak cataloged a number of examples: a 1,200-foot lazy river under construction at the Black Desert golf resort in Ivins; the Desert Color community, which built around an artificial lake that Andrechak described as a “giant evapo-pond”; another three man-made lakes for the Southern Shores water-skiing-housing complex in Hurricane, and perhaps most bewildering, a Yogi Bear-themed water park east of St. George. The water park will require 5 million gallons or more of culinary-grade drinking water annually for rides like one nicknamed the “Royal Flush,” a toilet bowl-shaped slide. The Sand Hollow golf course next door gulps up 60 times as much water. “We’re 23 years into a mega drought, and yet my struggle here is that we’re not really that concerned about it,” Andrechak said. “That’s the culture.”

This culture is enabled and even nurtured by policy: St. George’s water rates are among the lowest in the West, which results in bigger profits for course operators and more affordable green fees, but also disincentivizes conservation. “The whole idea has been to have low (water) rates to take care of the citizens by making golf affordable,” said Dehlin. “Having affordable water is important for the growth of the game and to keep our facilities in the conditions that we do. And that’s one thing about golf courses in Utah in general: they’re very well-manicured, very well-kept,” Dehlin said. “And yes, well-irrigated.” ☀

POEM

Things We Were Told About the Moon in School

By Dara Yen Elerath

We were told the moon was the Earth’s only satellite.

We were told it was cratered, pocked and pitted from the impact of asteroids and comets.

We were told it was luminous against the dark.

We were sometimes told it was made of chalk and sometimes told it was made of cheese.

We were told the moon was a folded note trying to send itself to the sun.

We were told that if we read the note it would say *I’m cold. It’s lonely up here.*

We were told not to mind this kind of talk, that the moon was lying, it had no feelings. In this way, they said, it was akin to insects and fish.

We were told that fish kiss the water as they move through the waves.

We were told they are always drowning and they enjoy this act. *But how can they enjoy drowning?* we asked, and the answer was always the same: *Each enjoys whatever life offers.*

We began to ask each other, *Are you a moon or a fish?* Meaning, *Are you drowning or are you lonely?* I chose moon because I was orbiting the school in progressively wider arcs.

How far will I go? I wondered. My classmates reached for me; I tried to catch their fingers but they could not hold me; I was floating away.

Years later, I would recall their eyes gazing at me, how they looked, not like children’s eyes, but like moons drifting into darkness, drifting into space, trying to relate a message to the sun that, we all discovered, we would never be able to deliver.

WEB EXTRA Listen to Dara Yen Elerath recite her poem at hcn.org/about-the-moon



REPORTAGE

Finding a fix for 'forever chemicals'

After communities learn PFAS are in their water, what comes next?

BY SARAH TRENT | PHOTOS BY KAVEER RAI

JUST INSIDE THE rolled-up door of a pumphouse garage, Cole Benak pulled on a pair of black Nitrile gloves. Outside, morning sunshine warmed the quiet wooded hillside. From the room next door, three massive water pumps whined, pushing thousands of gallons per minute of Vancouver, Washington's drinking water toward a reservoir another mile uphill. Benak, a city engineering technician, checked his watch and marked the time on a plastic water sampling flask.

He turned and knelt behind a four-foot-wide panel fitted with gauges and valves and four tall, narrow cylinders — like a miniature pipe organ of plastic, each tube filled with water and a different type of filtering material. The water that enters these cylinders, like nearly all of Vancouver's water, is contaminated with common but dangerous chemicals called PFAS — perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. What flows out will help city officials determine which material is best at removing them. Benak opened the valve below one of the filter tubes, letting water first stream onto the concrete, then into the flask.

Vancouver officials first learned about PFAS contamination here in 2020, and they're still sorting out how to address it. "I have so many questions," said City Councilmember Sarah Fox. "What things do we need to consider? What are the drawbacks? Who needs to be at the table making some of these decisions?"

Benak screwed the lid onto the bottle and prepared another. His weekly samples are one step in a process that will transform Vancouver's water system, which serves 270,000 people. But it will come at a high price — at least \$170 million, likely far more

— and take years to complete. Research showing the health effects of PFAS has evolved far faster than the state and federal regulations that govern water systems, and communities are trying to catch up. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's most recent guidance is that no amount of PFAS contamination is safe, though it is still weighing the first-ever federal standards to regulate them. Achieving zero contamination may not be possible. As the EPA ramps up testing, officials here — and in communities across the U.S. — are grappling with exactly what must be done to keep their water safe.

PFAS ARE A SET of more than 9,000 man-made chemicals prized for being slippery and waterproof. But the qualities that make them useful in clothing, food packaging, factories and firefighting foam make them especially dangerous to human health: Nearly indestructible, they accumulate in the body and have been linked with serious health conditions — cancers, thyroid and liver disorders, weakened immune systems, developmental problems — even at extremely low levels. They leach into the environment wherever they're used and have been found in blood samples, breast milk, wild animals and rainwater worldwide. The non-profit Environmental Working Group estimates that the drinking water of at least two-thirds of all U.S. residents is contaminated.

When the Washington State Board of Health began to consider regulating PFAS in drinking water around 2017 — as numerous states have done in the absence of EPA rules — Vancouver's water manager, Tyler Clary, thought his system

had nothing to worry about. He'd tested for PFAS in 2013, and found none. Then, in 2020, "we tested new samples and came back with these hits all over the place," he said. Testing sensitivity had improved, he learned: Retesting old samples revealed that at least two of the city's aquifers had been contaminated at low levels all along — and that many wells had levels near or above what the state later recommended as safe.

Washington's standards, implemented in 2021, set limits for several of the most common types of PFAS, including PFOA and PFOS, which were used in products like Teflon and Scotchgard until companies started phasing them out in the early 2000s. The state limits PFOA at 10 parts per trillion (ppt) and PFOS at 15 ppt, both less than a single drop in an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The EPA's newest guidelines go further: Newer science shows that no amount is safe. But current test technology can only reliably detect PFOA and PFOS down to about 4 ppt — and so this year, the agency proposed that threshold as the new federal limit, which could take effect by 2026.

This March, Clary's team sampled water stations again. Most tested between 5 and 22 ppt for PFOA or PFOS. State rules recommend — but don't require — that water at six of the city's nine water stations be treated. If the EPA's proposed standards are enacted, every station but one would need an upgrade.

The shifting standards and evolving science put Clary and city officials in a tricky position, as far as planning and communicating risk to residents. Some Washington cities, including Airway Heights near Spokane, have water so contaminated — often by military use of

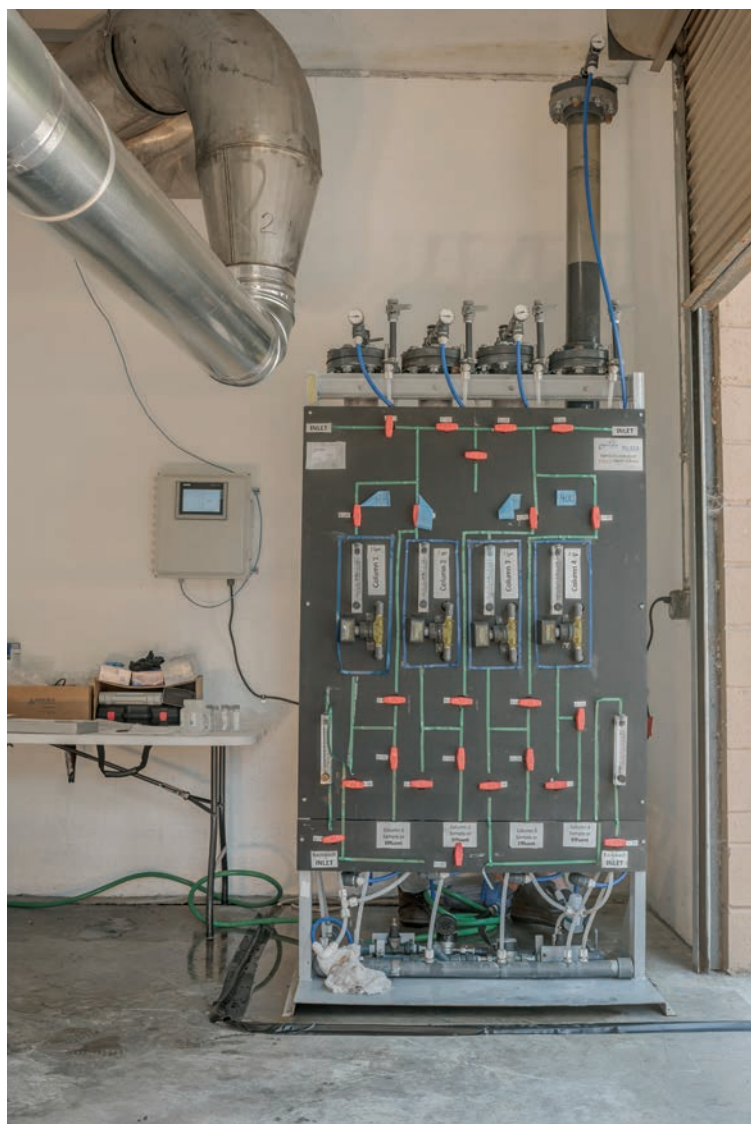
firefighting foam — that officials immediately shut down wells and brought in other water. In Vancouver, levels are low but so widespread that about half the city's water falls into a regulatory gray area: Not worrisome by state rules, but exceeding the pending federal standard. And the culprit has not yet been identified, so there is no single polluter to stop or hold accountable.

It's also difficult to tell residents how much is reaching their homes: Like many municipal systems, water from every station is mixed, and the amount drawn from any one well shifts to meet demand. When demand is low, Clary has been able to decrease use of the most contaminated wells. During peak summer use, he needs to turn that flow up again.

THERE IS GOOD NEWS, though: Filtering PFAS to meet state or federal limits isn't complicated, and the city has been through a similar process before. Near the pumphouse where Benak takes samples every Tuesday stand two white towers the size of upended school buses that have filtered tetrachloroethylene (PCE), a neurotoxic dry-cleaning chemical, since the '90s.

Benak's miniature pilot tanks are measuring how many months it takes before each filter becomes too saturated to work well. The longer a filter lasts, the cheaper the system will be to maintain. A preliminary engineering report suggested media replacement alone could cost Vancouver more than \$1 million per year.

Each of the filters has other costs and benefits to consider, too. One of Benak's test cylinders stands nearly twice as tall as the rest: Filled with granular activated carbon, it's the media



Cole Benak collects a water sample (*facing*). The pilot tanks contain different media being tested for PFAS filtration (*above*). Several of the test tanks contain resin microbeads, sand-like plastic that filters out PFAS via ion exchange (*top*).

most often used to filter PFOA and PFOS, which cling to the black carbon flakes like nails to a magnet. Activated carbon removes many other contaminants, too, likely including some that aren't known or regulated yet. Still, it may not be as good at catching newer, smaller types of PFAS that have been widely used to replace PFOA and PFOS but that similarly accumulate

to dangerous levels. Activated carbon systems also require a lot of real estate. This single station could require 16 towers, each filled with 60,000 pounds of carbon, that would displace the dog park next door.

The other three cylinders Benak is testing contain unique formulas of resin microbeads — a shiny golden sand-like plastic used for a filtration method

called ion exchange. These filters use a reaction similar to static cling: The negative ions of a PFAS molecule stick to the positively charged beads. This process is often better at catching short-chain PFAS, and the towers take up less space: Here, they'd need two-thirds the footprint of a carbon system. But they don't filter as many other contaminants and are harder to maintain.

Which media works best will also come down to the local water chemistry: Sediments, minerals and other compounds can interfere. Benak and Clary expect that by early next year, they'll have an idea of which will last the longest. Then, they can develop long-term construction plans and ask the state, federal government and city council for funds.

From there, engineers say systems to meet state limits would take at least six years to complete. The EPA's pending rules would add time and millions more in costs

— though a recent state lawsuit to make PFAS manufacturers pay for water treatment may help.

Councilmembers and the county health department are just starting to consider how to keep residents safe until then. Officials, including Fox, hope that the council or county will seek grant dollars to buy home filters for vulnerable low-income residents. The state already recommends that breastfeeding parents avoid tap water that's over the state limit, and suggests mixing infant formula with adequately filtered water.

After an hour of pulling samples from all four test cylinders, Benak shut off the last valve. The systems he's helping to assess aren't complicated or scary, he said — just really, really big. Packing up the flasks, vials and paperwork, he stepped through the puddle spread across the concrete — Vancouver water, free of detectable PFAS — then set off in his SUV toward the lab. ☀

*“What things do we need to consider?
What are the drawbacks?
Who needs to be at the table making
these decisions?”*

The Clark County Dog Park is next door to one of Vancouver's water pump stations (left). A new activated carbon system could require 16 towers, each filled with 60,000 pounds of carbon, which would displace the dog park. Two towers near the pump house filter tetrachloroethylene (PCE), a neurotoxic dry-cleaning chemical (right).



The Supreme Court upheld ICWA — now what?

Indian law and policy experts break down the court's *Brackeen v. Haaland* ruling on the Indian Child Welfare Act.

BY NICK MARTIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LAUREN CROW



IN JUNE, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered a decisive victory for tribal nations. In a 7-2 ruling in *Haaland v. Brackeen*, the court upheld the constitutionality of the Indian Child Welfare Act, rejecting a challenge that University of Michigan law professor Matthew Fletcher described to *High Country News* as “a broadside against virtually (all) of federal Indian law.”

Passed in 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was a response to decades of federal and state policies designed to remove Native kids from their families and cultures. ICWA was built on the principle that tribal nations exist as political sovereigns and that therefore child welfare cases involving Native children should prioritize their placement with Native families, in particular families within the child’s own tribe. The law stands as a distinct marker, both in U.S.-tribal policy and in the lives of those who remember what came before. Reflecting

on the effects of U.S. policies on Indigenous families, Chief Judge Allie Maldonado (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians) told *HCN* last year, “Pre-ICWA practices destroyed my family. But ICWA gave me a family.”

For the past two decades, non-Native parents, states and conservative and libertarian organizations, such as the Goldwater Institute, have mounted legal challenges to the law. The *Brackeen* case was brought by a group of petitioners that included several non-Native couples and the states of Texas, Indiana and Louisiana. ICWA was the legal target, but their goal was to ultimately limit the federal government’s ability to implement programs, policies and laws that treat tribes as sovereign nations. They also argued that the priority system ICWA employs is based on a racial, not a political, classification and thus violates the constitutional standards — known as the Equal Protection

Clause — set out in the Fifth and 14th amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

The Supreme Court, however, did not validate these claims — at least not this time around. Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote the majority opinion, while Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented. But the court’s diverging views on the future of federal-tribal policy were apparent in the concurring opinions written by Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch. Kavanaugh opened the door for a potential future legal challenge tied to the Equal Protection Clause and the petitioners’ claim that Native people should be treated as a racial class rather than as citizens of sovereign nations. Meanwhile, Gorsuch penned a history-laden concurrence that left at least one law professor optimistic.

High Country News asked a group of ICWA policy and federal Indian law experts about

the *Brackeen* decision as well as about the next steps facing tribal nations and organizations. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

This is a basic question to open with, but it feels called for, given the amount of anxiety and tension expressed throughout Indian Country leading up to this opinion: How significant is the Supreme Court’s decision to uphold ICWA as federal law?

Matthew Fletcher (Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians; professor of law at the University of Michigan Law School): This is an absolutely massive opinion on multiple fronts. The main challenge, rejected by seven judges, was to congressional Indian affairs powers. This was a broadside against virtually *all* of federal Indian law. It has been a pet project of Justice Thomas now since at least 2004; he’s written five or six concurring

and dissenting opinions calling for the court to reconsider this basic tenet of the field. And, after all this time, even with the dramatic shift of the court to the extreme right, not a single judge has ever signed on to one of his opinions. I like to think this case finally settles the matter of the grand scope of federal power in Indian affairs.

Sarah Kastelic (Alutiiq; executive director, National Indian Child Welfare Association): I cannot emphasize enough what a huge win this ruling is for Native children, Native families and the future of Native peoples. The court's decision affirmed that the Indian Child Welfare Act is constitutional, puts the best interests of Native kids first and is grounded in tribal sovereignty. The opposition's argument in this case was a culmination of biased and misleading attacks on tribal sovereignty that Indian Country has been dealing with for years. With this ruling, the justices have sent a clear message that these bogus attacks have no legal foundation and will not be tolerated.

Angelique EagleWoman (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota Oyate; director, Native American Law and Sovereignty Institute; professor, Mitchell Hamline School of Law): The *Haaland v. Brackeen* decision was the third by the U.S. Supreme Court on the Indian Child Welfare Act and was a strong affirmation of the U.S. Congress' authority to enact the federal law. The majority opinion with seven justices suggests a strong adherence to the fundamental understanding of the government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the United States, and the authority for federal law to protect tribal children



From top: Matthew Fletcher, Sarah Kastelic, Angelique EagleWoman and Lauren van Schilfgaarde.

and other tribal interests. It is a wonderful full-circle moment to see the secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, Laguna Pueblo, with her name on the most recent U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the vitality of the Indian Child Welfare Act. This is true justice and culturally affirming when the branches of the U.S. government work together as treaty partners with a trust responsibility to tribal nations and children.

The effectiveness of ICWA, in practice, still often relies on the willing collaboration of state agencies. Over the past few years, as this case was winding its way through the federal court system, a number of state legislatures drafted and passed bills to create a state-level ICWA standard. Have these kinds of bills functionally changed the state systems for Native children? And how can states work with tribal nations to further strengthen the existing ICWA model?

MF: The influx of state legislatures, many of them in deep red states, adopting ICWA and otherwise supporting ICWA is huge from an optics point, perhaps showing to the conservative members of the court that they will face no real backlash from their ideological friends if they voted to uphold ICWA. On a practice level, the statutes can be very good in dealing with specific kinds of issues that might arise in certain states. Washington, for example, includes Indian children whose parents are not yet enrolled. (ICWA requires a parent to be enrolled.) But the state ICWAs are also very helpful symbolically, making ICWA state law. In Michigan, some state judges told tribal and Indian parental advocates that ICWA

was federal law and they didn't have to follow it; that was obviously wrong, but there was little or no remedy available to deal with those types of judges. You can imagine (that), in a red state, domesticating ICWA as state law can be a big deal.

SK: Yes, these bills have changed state child welfare systems for Native children for the better. There are now 14 states that have passed state ICWA laws, recognizing the benefits for Native children and families. State ICWA laws ensure greater understanding and investment in ICWA's success by local and statewide leaders that participate in the legislative and implementation process of the laws. They also ensure that the requirements in the federal law are tailored to local state issues. Finally, they often put more emphasis on collecting statewide and local data that can be used to improve the system for Native kids. States and tribes can further work together to develop ICWA courts that are able to respond more effectively to ICWA cases. (They can also) create training collaborations, where state and tribal representatives work together to train the child welfare workforce on a more complete understanding of why ICWA is important.

AEW: As several states have enacted companion legislation to the Indian Child Welfare Act, there are often state provisions to fill in more specifics on processes and to provide greater protections. Under the recently enacted Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act amendments, there is now a section titled "Policy on Tribal-State Relations" that includes the following language: "260.754(d) The state of Minnesota

recognizes all federally recognized Indian Tribes as having the inherent authority to determine their own jurisdiction for any and all Indian child custody or child placement proceedings regardless of whether the Tribe's members are on or off the reservation and regardless of the procedural posture of the proceeding."

Lauren van Schilfgaarde (Cochiti Pueblo; assistant professor, UCLA School of Law): ICWA compliance has been a 45-year struggle. This struggle is now permitted to continue. Domesticating ICWA into state law brings numerous benefits, including simply normalizing the law into state policy and streamlining its provisions as state norms. But state ICWAs have also done great work in expanding ICWA, in expanding engagement with tribes and in expanding child welfare protections. States can and should continue this work! Extensive litigation resources are spent on whether ICWA should apply. States could alleviate this by injecting an assumption that ICWA should apply, and that active efforts should be the default expectation. Many of the harms felt by families in ICWA are inflicted because ICWA was not complied with at the outset, and we cannot go back in time. State ICWAs can help with this.

In his concurring opinion, Justice Kavanaugh took the time to note that "the equal protection issue is serious," and went on to lay out his belief that federal courts, including the Supreme Court, will be able to address the equal protection matter "when it is properly raised by a plaintiff with standing." By my reading, it appears that Justice Kavanaugh is, if not inviting another

challenge, at least gesturing to the idea that he and others on the court may still deem parts of ICWA unconstitutional on these grounds. How do you interpret the justice's language around equal protection here?

MF: Yes, Kavanaugh's opinion definitely invites additional challenges to ICWA on the equal protection front, but as the facts of this case demonstrate, there are only a couple ICWA provisions that are subject to much challenge, and these provisions have never even been the subject of a published opinion in the lower courts. For example, there is a serious equal protection challenge to a gaming compact in Washington — serious in that it's being handled by Paul Clement, who is a movement conservative's favorite litigator, but that is a one-off case that might now have legs.

LvS: Justice Kavanaugh's concurring opinion mirrors his stated concerns in oral argument — that equal protection is a potent concern to a statute aimed at Natives, and more specifically, a statute that seemingly disadvantages non-Native prospective adoptive parents. The majority opinion largely sidesteps this issue by dismissing the claim for lack of standing, or, simply, wrong court. This claim should be brought in state court. Keep in mind, ICWA is not a single mass, but rather is a sum of discrete provisions. One provision can be held as unconstitutional while others remain good law. The court held they would not reach the merits of an equal protection challenge to ICWA's provision regarding a hierarchy of placement preferences. In theory, this provision could be challenged in a future case that cures the

current standing deficiencies, while the remaining provisions in ICWA that were upheld in *Brackeen* remain constitutionally sound. Justice Kavanaugh is clearly inviting such a case.

AEW: The majority opinion rightly noted that the non-Native prospective adoptive parents and the state of Texas had no real injury to address as the case was against the Department of Interior. The prospective adoptive parents could not show an injury by the Interior Department. Likewise, the state of Texas cannot assert an equal protection injury or stand in for state citizens to assert an injury. Anti-tribal sovereignty sentiments have been ongoing and the Indian Child Welfare Act subject to challenge since its enactment in 1978. It is hard to imagine that the reasoning laid out in the majority opinion would bend to a new challenge on equal protection grounds by framing the issue as somehow breaking with federal law and imposing a racial classification for tribal children. This decision sends a clear signal that the federal legal standard for tribal children is a political status as members of tribal nations.

In Part IV of Justice Neil Gorsuch's concurring opinion, on the final page, he concluded with the following lines:

"In adopting the Indian Child Welfare Act, Congress exercised that lawful authority to secure the right of Indian parents to raise their families as they please; the right of Indian children to grow in their culture; and the right of Indian communities to resist fading into the twilight of history. All of that is in keeping with the Constitution's original design."

What was your reaction to

reading Justice Gorsuch's opinion? How does this decision shape your evolving analysis of the current court's legacy on matters of tribal sovereignty?

MF: Justice Gorsuch certainly does include welcome and favorable language like this, but he rarely writes for majorities with this language. (*McGirt* was an exception.) One hand, it's lovely rhetorical fodder, but on the other, it's not operative language that could be expected to persuade other (Supreme Court) judges in the future.

The problem with Gorsuch is that the flourishes might be an effort to shame anyone who votes against his position, and that's not a very good roadmap for building a majority or a consensus. Gorsuch also has a reputation for writing really scathingly, and he might lose a vote or two because he can be insulting as well as shaming. Scalia was like this, too. Neither of those are really good characteristics, and putting them both together can make things difficult for Gorsuch to build a majority.

LvS: My heart beamed. There are simply too many U.S. Supreme Court cases that diminish tribal sovereignty, negate tribal histories and minimize tribal interests. It is difficult not to assume a preference by the court to see tribes disappear and a disappointment that they haven't already. Justice Gorsuch's words were a definitive clapback — a declaration that tribes exist, that they are a necessary and explicit component of the American legal struggle, and most poignantly, that tribes shall exist in the future. I am only saddened that no other justice sought to join him in that Part IV. ✨

An antiquated law rules mining in the West

Can the U.S. finally vanquish one of the most enduring Lords of Yesterday?

BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

IN OCTOBER 2022, Canada-based Atomic Minerals Corporation announced it had “acquired by staking” more than 6,500 acres of public land on Harts Point in southeastern Utah, a sandstone mesa just outside Bears Ears National Monument that’s bordered on one side by Indian Creek, a popular rock-climbing area. The company’s word choice was a bit off: It didn’t actually *acquire* the land, it merely secured the right to exploit it: to mine it by locating — or staking — 324 lode claims.

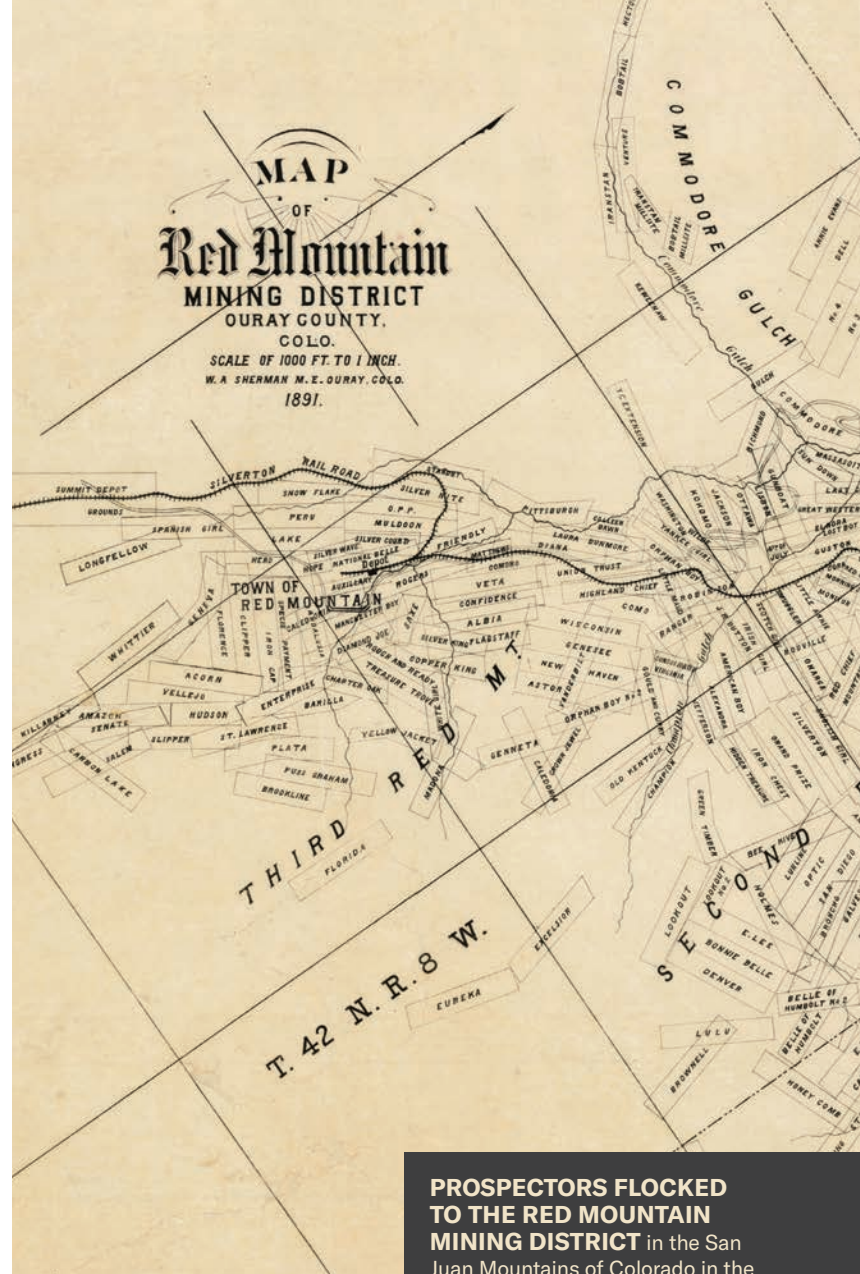
Atomic Minerals didn’t need to get a permit from regulators or inform the public in order to do this. Nor did it have to consult with the tribal nations that had unsuccessfully urged the Obama administration to include Harts Point in Bears Ears. Nope; the uranium mining company’s American subsidiary merely needed to file the locations with the Bureau of Land Management and pay \$225 per claim in processing, filing and maintenance fees. The BLM then gave the company the preliminary go-ahead to do exploratory drilling on the land, once again without public notice or rigorous review.

If the corporation decides to go forward with mining, the proposal will become subject to

environmental analysis. But once it obtains the relevant permits, Atomic Minerals is free to ravage Harts Point and yank uranium and other minerals belonging to all Americans out of the ground, without paying a cent in royalties.

If this sounds like a scenario right out of the 19th century, that’s because it is. Hardrock mineral exploration on public lands is governed by the General Mining Law of 1872, which makes “all valuable mineral deposits” in public lands “free and open to exploration.” The law hasn’t fundamentally changed in 151 years, making it one of the most persistent of what the late scholar Charles Wilkinson dubbed the “Lords of Yesterday,” the old and obsolete laws governing natural resource use and extraction.

Over the past couple of years, companies have staked a slew of new claims on public lands. The current land rush mirrors that of the late 1800s, when corporations used the law to profit from places like the Red Mountain region of Colorado, where the mining legacy lives on in the form of tainted water and torn-up landscapes. Only this time, they’re going after more than gold and silver; they also want the so-called “green metals” — the lithium, cobalt, copper and rare



PROSPECTORS FLOCKED TO THE RED MOUNTAIN MINING DISTRICT in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado in the 1880s and 1890s, staking claims on the iron-rich red-orange slopes that give the place its name.

The only thing a claimant needed was evidence that some minerals were present and the willingness to do \$100 worth of work annually. Today, claimants merely have to pay an annual maintenance fee of \$165 per claim in order to keep it active.

Most of these were 10-acre lode claims that follow a mineral vein. A few larger placer claims can also be seen on this map; they were usually staked along riverbeds for

earth elements used in electric vehicles and other clean energy applications. At the same time, a recent push to start building advanced nuclear reactors appears to be rousing the domestic uranium mining industry from its decades-long slumber.

That, in turn, has sparked a new push from lawmakers, environmentalists and the Biden administration to finally bring federal mining law into the 21st century. But can this Lord of Yesterday really be deposed? Or will corporate greed, profit and political inertia once again use their influence and money to prop up this rusty old framework? ☀

SOURCES: Bureau of Land Management, Government Accountability Office, Congressional Research Service, Earthworks, Center for American Progress, Map: The Barry Lawrence Ruderman Map Collection / Stanford University Libraries



extracting minerals from gravel or sand. Scattered amid the chaos are also smaller mill sites, which are claims on non-mineral lands used to build mills or dispose of tailings.

The typical claimant back then was an individual, like Olaf Arvid Nelson, who staked the Gold King claim over the hill from here in 1887. (It was the site of a notorious disaster in 2015.) Claimants then usually leased or sold their claims to corporations or investors with resources to develop the mine.

Then, as now, corporations could pull unlimited quantities of minerals from their claims without paying a cent of royalties to the minerals' actual owner — the American public. This amounts to

a subsidy of hundreds of millions of dollars per year, mostly to multinational corporations. No one knows exactly how much, because no one keeps track of mineral production from federal lands.

The 1872 General Mining Law allows claimants to patent, or acquire, clear title to their claims, for a paltry fee just five years after staking it. This provision encouraged the privatization of thousands of acres of public lands, resulting in a chaotic land-ownership pattern — and headaches for local officials — in former mining zones like Red Mountain.

Then, in 1994, Congress put a moratorium on all new land patents. But it did so without

changing the law itself, meaning that lawmakers must renew the moratorium on a yearly basis. Meanwhile, companies continue to stake and mine un-patented claims under the 151-year-old law.

The General Mining Law of 1872 contains no environmental provisions and no reclamation requirements, so corporations can simply walk away from their mines once they're no longer profitable. Hundreds of thousands of legacy mining sites now dot the Western U.S.; many of them have never been cleaned up and continue to spew acid mine drainage into streams. Most of the claims on this map were part of the Idarado Mine Colorado Superfund cleanup in the 1990s.

PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE MINING LAW

Implementing a 12.5% royalty on new mining operations and 8% for existing mines;

Returning 25% of the royalty revenue to communities impacted by the mining with the remaining 75% going to a reclamation fund;

Replacing claim-staking and patenting with a leasing system like the one governing oil, gas, coal and other federal land uses.

MINING LAW BY THE NUMBERS

11.36 million

Acres of public land staked with active mining claims at the end of the 2022 fiscal year. This is a 932,000-acre increase from the previous year.

228,696

Number of active mining claims covering nearly 6 million acres of federal land in Nevada at the end of FY 2021.

267,535

Number of active mining claims on federal land in Nevada as of June 12, 2023, an increase of nearly 40,000 in just 18 months.

13

Minimum number of active mining claims staked within Bears Ears National Monument since 2016. These claims were located either in the months just before the national monument was established, or after it had been shrunk by then-President Donald Trump but before President Joe Biden restored the boundaries. National monument status bars new mining claims, but does not affect existing ones like these.

\$34.4 billion

Value of non-fuel mineral production in 2019 on all lands in 12 Western states.

Unknown

Amount of that mineral production extracted from federal lands. The number is unknown because federal agencies do not track production. Earthworks, a mining watchdog group, has estimated that \$2 billion to \$3 billion worth of minerals is extracted from public lands annually.

12.5% to 18.75%

Royalty rate on oil, natural gas and coal extracted from public lands.

\$14.8 billion

Royalties paid on oil and gas production from federal lands in 2022.

\$0

Royalties paid on hardrock minerals extracted from mining claims on public land, including copper, gold, silver, lithium, uranium and various "green metals," between 1872 and 2023.

A herd of bison, including several adults and young calves, are walking towards the camera in a grassy field. The background is a hazy, mountainous landscape.

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Susan Heyneman | Sheridan, WY
Jan Hodder & Mike Graybill | Coos Bay, OR
Daniel Horton & Rita Kester | Rio Rico, AZ
Diane Hurd | Port Townsend, WA
Linda Kahan | Olympia, WA
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Franz Amador & Dorothy Neville | Seattle, WA

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Eric Waltari | San Francisco, CA
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Steve Williams | Grand Junction, CO
John Wise | Ashland, OR
Greg Woodall | Hurricane, UT
Thomas C. & Pamela A. Wylie | Centennial, CO

MEMBERS FOR 10-14 YEARS

Anonymous (4)
In honor of Ray Haertel
In honor of Ashley Krest
In honor of Farley Maxwell
In honor of Vernon & Wes Stewart
In memory of Joan Reichard-Baxter
In memory of Ralph Bidwell
In memory of Keeley Bihr
In memory of H. Lloyd Keith
In memory of Mama Laura
In memory of Dave McKee
In memory of Howard Lewis Patterson
In memory of Richard West Sellers
In memory of Stewart Udall
In memory of Betty Wigington
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Len Gallagher | Mancos, CO
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Karen & Tom Guter | Fort Collins, CO
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Diana Hartel | National City, CA
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Jack Heneghan | Colorado Springs, CO
Brian Richter & Martha Hodgkins | Crozet, VA
Lois Horst | Magalia, CA
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Mia Monroe & Steve Meyer | Mill Valley, CA
Thomas Moore | Troy, ID
Ray Mosser | Portland, OR

Lynn Nebus | Bend, OR
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Calvin & Helen Pagel | Elizabeth, CO
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Bev Paulan | Antioch, IL
Marsha Perry-Ellis | Pueblo, CO
Brian & Abbie Peters | Markleeville, CA
Neill Piland | Fort Collins, CO
Joan Poor | Edmonds, WA
Peter Prince | Santa Fe, NM
Carolyn Prinster | Glenwood Springs, CO
Rebecca Quintana | Taos, NM
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Mike Todd | Phoenix, AZ
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Paul Zarn | Petaluma, CA

MEMBERS FOR 5-9 YEARS

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In honor of Animal Urgent Care | Depoe Bay, OR
In honor of Theresa Cardenas
In honor of Patrick Finley
In honor of immigrants and migrants
In honor of the journalists, interns, clerks &
cleaning & maintenance staff at *HCN* for
the excellent work that you do. And
photographers!
In honor of Paul Larmer
In honor of Bob & Julie Phyllyk
In honor of Alyssa Pinkerton
In honor of Jim Proctor



*“Much, much gratitude for your persistence
in expertly bringing our attention to the
immense and intricate weaving of Beauty
and Challenge the living land and diverse
peoples of the West are IN!”*

—Mary E. Marsden, Boulder, Colorado



“High Country News is a lifeline. For almost 30 years, this publication has been my connection to a community of wise, thoughtful individuals who love the West as much as I do, and work hard to create what Wallace Stegner called “a society to match the scenery.” I feel lucky to have spent so much of my professional life at HCN, and gladly give back each month. I love to support great journalism, of course, but more than that, I think of it as an investment in community, and a brighter future for the West.”

—Greg Hanscom, executive director and publisher of *High Country News*

In honor of Dan Stonington & Emily Stonington-Hibbard
In honor of Ed Walford
In memory of Jerry Cebula
In memory of Skyre Criswell
In memory of Laurel Dana
In memory of David L. Ford
In memory of Rosemarie Goodbody
In memory of Dorothy & Jerry Lacy
In memory of Norma McCallan
In memory of Ken McDonald
In memory of Glen H. Phillips
In memory of John & Edith Pierpont
In memory of Tia Pullen
In memory of Patrene Rice
In memory of my mom, Gladys Richter
In memory of Rattana Ros
In memory of Richard Lon Rowland
In memory of Kenneth Tegtman
In memory of Gilbert White
Jae Abel | Palo Alto, CA
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Jeremiah Church | Ashland, OR
Minette Church | Colorado Springs, CO
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Kimberly Hannula | Durango, CO
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Sean Kimbrel | Washington, DC
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Vaughn & Mary Martin | Clatskanie, OR
Steve Martinek | Tucson, AZ
William Doelle & Linda Mayo | Tucson, AZ
Chuck & LeeAnn McAda | Clifton, CO
Dan McCormack | Magnolia, TX
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Lucy Ware McGuffey | Durango, CO
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James & Marsha Miller | Denver, CO
Jerry Mishler | Corbett, OR
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 In honor of Nicky Conroy
 In honor of Cycle Farm
 In honor of JR
 In honor of Robert Longoni Jr.
 In honor of Heather Peeters
 In honor of Thomas Rupert
 In honor of Sasha the dog | Los Altos, CA
 In honor of Diane Sylvain, the conscience of
HCN and its voice
 In honor of Sam Van Wetter
 In memory of Susan I. Anderson
 In memory of Tom Aron
 In memory of Tom Bell
 In memory of Page Billings, my dad, who
 brought me to wild places
 In memory of Susan M. Brillante
 In memory of Chuck Campbell, a faithful
 reader of *HCN*
 In memory of Dale & Barbara Croley
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 In memory of Jo Anne Garrett
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 In memory of William Thomas
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 Fred Beauvais | Fort Collins, CO
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 Rebecca Brown | Arvada, CO
 William Adam Brown | Denver, CO
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 Barbara & Mark Fowler | Durango, CO
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HCN in ABQ



Staffers (pictured from left) Gretchen King, Jennifer Sahn, Gary Love and Michelle Nijhuis make time for a hike in Petroglyph National Monument near Albuquerque. Inset: Board members and staff meet at Ben Michael's Restaurant for dinner. **HCN staff photos. Photo illustration by Marissa Garcia / HCN**

The *High Country News* Board of Directors met in May in Albuquerque, where we had a chance to reconnect face-to-face and visit with new and longtime friends of *HCN*.

New Mexico's celebrity environment reporter **Laura Paskus** — who is also a PBS producer and a former *HCN* staffer — moderated a panel about environmental justice in the state. We were astonished by the massive scale of oil and gas drilling in New Mexico; it's currently second only to Texas in terms of annual oil production. Unfortunately, the energy companies are polluting air and water with little oversight from the state, according to **Samantha Ruscavage-Barz**, WildEarth Guardians' legal director. But local people are finding creative ways to hold the industry accountable. **Kayley Shoup**, of Citizens Caring for the Future, spoke about working to bring community members together to defend public health, something that can be challenging in company towns in the oil-drenched Permian Basin.

Now, a group of young people has sued the state, arguing that its oil and gas permitting

and failure to enforce pollution laws violate the New Mexico Constitution, which states that a “beautiful and healthful environment” is “of fundamental importance to the public interest, health, safety and the general welfare.” **Jonathan Juarez-Alonzo**, of Youth United for Climate Crisis Action (YUCCA), one of the plaintiffs in the case, pointed out that we already have all the technology we need to make a swift transition to clean energy; we just need to commit to doing the work.

In a meeting at Hotel Albuquerque, *HCN* staff told the board that this has been a difficult year for fundraising. Many of our readers are struggling to make ends meet, and some longtime supporters who often give generously have had to pull back a bit, owing to the tumultuous financial climate. We've made up ground since then, however, and have found ways to tighten our belts, so while we continue to hear about hard times at other news outlets, this reader-supported nonprofit is soldiering on. Thank you!

But the board's biggest decision was to approve a three-year strategic road map for the

organization — the product of nine months of hard work by both staff and board.

We're excited about this new strategic plan, which we hope will help us engage a new generation of readers who care about the West and its future. It includes:

- Critical upgrades to *HCN*'s website and other digital infrastructure
- Outreach and partnerships to connect with new and diverse audiences
- A new “customer journey” that lowers barriers to entry and draws readers into deeper involvement over time
- Tools and information that encourage civic participation and empower readers to drive positive change

We'll have more information for you in the coming months, especially as our new website comes online in the fall.

*Greg Hanscom,
executive director and publisher*

CHASED BY FLAMES

The story of two hikers caught in the
path of the Bolt Creek Fire.

By Kylie Mohr
Aftermath photos by Peter Bohler

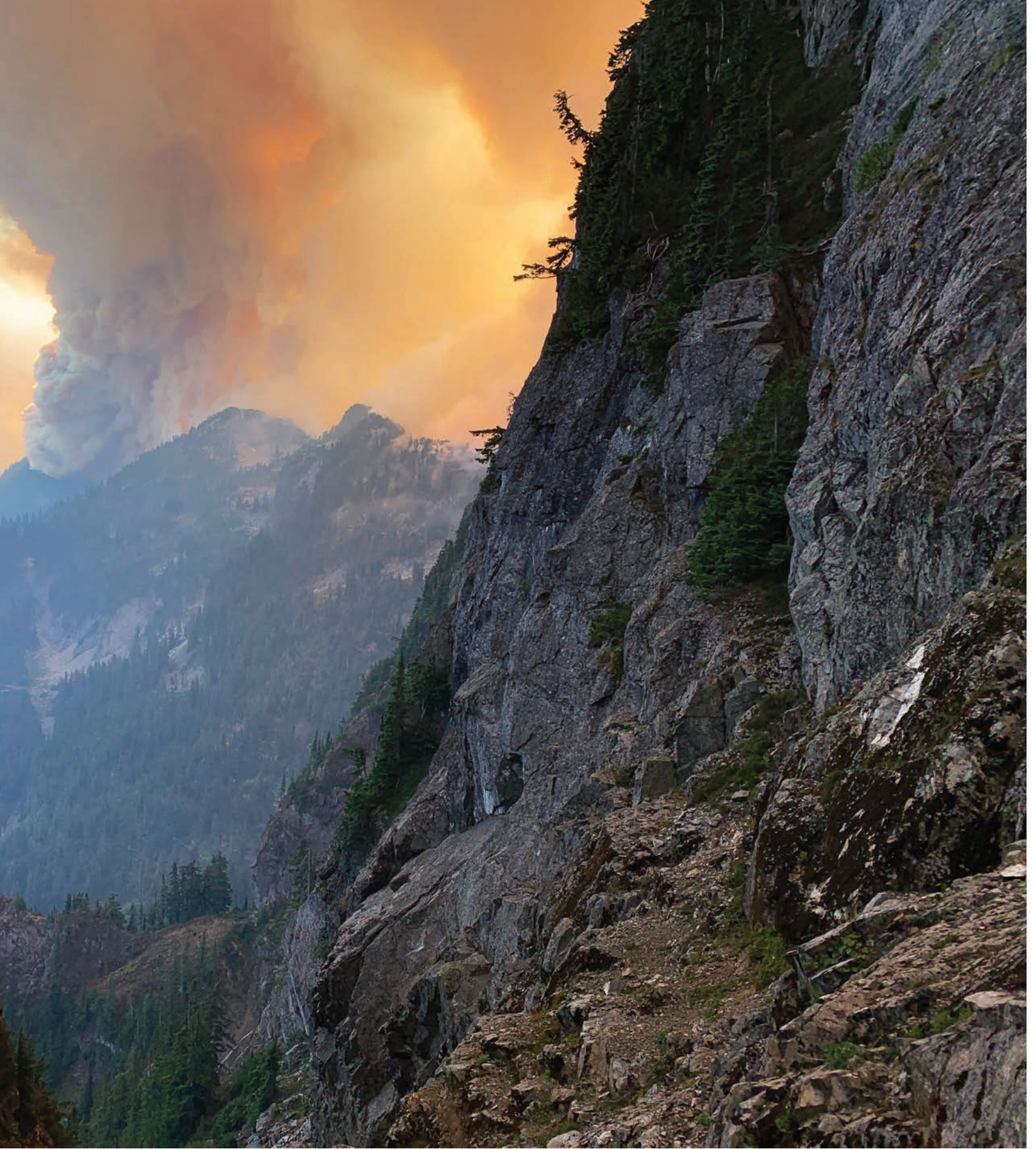
MATT BISHOP AND STEVE COOPER grabbed exposed roots and mossy rocks for balance as they climbed up a steep hillside. It was just after 7 a.m. on Sept. 10, 2022, and the two friends were headed up Baring Mountain, on the edge of the Wild Sky Wilderness in Washington's Cascade Range. Silver firs, cedars and hemlocks encroached on the unmaintained trail, and although the sun was still low in the sky, the morning was hot and sweat clung to the back of their necks.

Bishop, an engineering manager for an aerospace company, and Cooper, a commercial electrician, had met five years earlier and started hiking together almost every weekend during the height of the pandemic. They shared a love of solitude and summits that made them excellent companions, in sync on where and how they wanted to explore. Cooper created a YouTube channel, *The Path Least Taken*, to document their adventures, including the Baring Mountain trek.

The men chatted and took turns filming each other as they picked their way through brush and lime-green ferns, gaining almost 2,000 vertical feet in less than half a mile. "Keeps you on your edge, that's for sure," Cooper says to Bishop in one clip. Mountain views unfurled on both sides of the ridgeline, overlooking the ancestral homelands of Indigenous people from the Tulalip, Stillaguamish, Snoqualmie and other tribes, where some still harvest huckleberries and cedar today. Far below, beyond the trees, the South Fork of the Skykomish River meandered in a silver-blue ribbon. The trail funneled Bishop and Cooper into a



The view of the Bolt Creek Fire from
Baring Mountain.



*“We’re going to turn around. I don’t want to risk it.
It’s going to blow up. I see the flames.”*

boulder-filled gully. They glimpsed blue sky as they scrambled up the rocky chasm and started their final push to the summit.

The view from the next outcrop brought them to a halt. At the trailhead that morning, they'd noticed some smoke, but thought it was acrid haze from fires in eastern Washington — not a big deal, as long as they could breathe easily. But now it was more than haze: Deep orange flames and dark gray plumes of smoke blocked the sky. This was a new fire, three peaks down the ridgeline — and headed their way.

Bishop pulled out his phone and saw a text from his wife of 23 years, Sonia. She'd noticed smoke while setting up a church classroom 40 miles away in Snohomish and texted to ask if he was all right. Bishop sent her photos of the mountains, surrounded by smoke and flames, and a message: "love you." "That looks too close," she replied.

Bishop suggested turning back and Cooper, on video, agreed. "Yeah, we're going to turn around," he said. "I don't want to risk it." His voice trailed off. "It's going to blow up," Cooper added. "I see the flames."

"It's pretty big," Bishop agreed off-camera, his voice muffled by high winds that had set the evergreens around them dancing, their branches swaying. Bishop texted Sonia: They were getting out. The hikers hurried back down the gully they'd just ascended.

But the blaze had other plans. Halfway down the chute, Bishop and Cooper watched in horror as the fire, hungry for fuel, snaked its way around the backside of the ridge and emerged in front of them. Flames engulfed the trail below the gully, consuming their escape route, roaring like a jet engine preparing for takeoff. "Oh fuck," Cooper said. "That came fast, dude." "Hopefully you guys get to see this video," Bishop added, brow furrowed. "Otherwise, we didn't make it." He sent another message to his wife: "We're trapped."

Their breathing short and shallow, they considered their only option: Scramble back up the scree they'd just descended to huddle below Baring Mountain's jagged peak, the rocky, open space a potential refuge — or a dead end.

SEVEN HOURS EARLIER and seven miles away, Katijo Maher had awakened to the sound of her basset hound, Frida Hansdottier, throwing up. When she rushed the dog outside, she saw a fiery glow on the hills above

"Hopefully you guys get to see this video. Otherwise, we didn't make it."

Smoke from the Bolt Creek Fire fills a rocky gully on Baring Mountain (facing).

Steve Cooper, left, and Matt Bishop text a selfie to Bishop's wife while waiting to hear if search and rescue teams can reach them (below).



town. "That's not the sun," she thought.

Maheer, a former firefighter and visitor information specialist at the Skykomish Ranger District, knows how fast fires can move. The National Weather Service had predicted high fire danger that weekend; the region was in the midst of a record-breaking dry summer, with only half an inch of rain in nearby Seattle all season. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest had just raised its fire danger rating to "very high," noting in a press release that high winds, low humidity and hot temperatures had turned the forest "into a virtual tinderbox."

Fires on the wetter, cooler west side of the Cascades, where the hikers were, have historically been rare. But they've become more common in the last two decades, and the Pacific Northwest is experiencing longer fire seasons. More acres burned over two weeks in 2020 than in the last five decades. Wildfires across the United States are fueled by hotter, drier conditions caused by climate change and decades of federal fire suppression policies — including the stifling of Indigenous burning practices — that created a fuel buildup. While low-intensity wildfires are part of a healthy forest, blazes that burn everything to a crisp can do more harm than good.

According to Maheer's boss, Skykomish District Ranger Joe Neal, the national forest and private timberlands around Baring Mountain are on an every 200- to 300-year fire cycle — and the last recorded major blaze occurred sometime in the 1700s. They were overdue.

Maheer called the forest's fire management officer, triggering the mobilization of local, state and federal firefighting resources. The blaze had begun on private timberlands, which fall under the Washington Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) jurisdiction, but it quickly crossed into neighboring national forest. By 6:30 a.m., the Forest Service had requested as many firefighting resources from the DNR as possible. The Bolt Creek Fire, as it was dubbed, quickly grew in size and severity as 100-foot-high flames licked dry tree branches and gobbled leftover logging debris.

As locals evacuating the community of Grotto fled west, firefighters and emergency responders headed east. The Skykomish Fire Department, fighting to keep the fire from the town, needed reinforcements. DNR Incident Commander Gene Phillips sped down



Highway 2 to establish a joint command post at the Skykomish Ranger Station. Chunks of ash and flaming embers hit the windshield of his truck. “This fire was going big,” he said. “It was romping.”

Not yet aware of the backcountry hikers, Snohomish County Search and Rescue launched a reconnaissance flight over the area, where hundreds of people a day visit a popular lake. Pilot Bill Quistorf guided his small plane closer to the blaze, but the ride grew choppy — airspace around wildfires can be incredibly turbulent due to rising hot air. “I’ve been flying for 50 years,” Quistorf said. “That was the worst turbulence I’ve ever flown in.” The rough air forced him to turn around; he later learned he’d been just half a mile away from Bishop and Cooper.

Wind, smoke and jagged terrain complicated aerial firefighting all morning. The air tankers that drop water and fire retardant couldn’t fly safely in the narrow river canyon along the fire’s southern edge, and the way the smoke draped over the landscape made it

dangerous for helicopters, too. The few retardant drops pilots did manage failed. “The fire just blew right over,” Phillips said. “(The retardant) really didn’t even slow it down.”

ON THE ROCKY SLOPE below Baring Mountain’s peak, just before noon, Bishop and Cooper found a pocket of cell service. It was about 30 minutes after they first saw flames. Cooper called his partner, Ed, on his cellphone and then used his emergency palm-sized satellite phone to send an SOS notification with their coordinates to an emergency response coordination center. He also called 911. “We have fire all around us and we can’t get out,” Cooper told a dispatcher. The operator said they’d inform search and rescue crews, who’d call back. The men took a selfie while they waited. In the photograph, their noses and mouths are covered by long-sleeved T-shirts, dampened with water from their packs, to block the smoke funneling up the gully they were crouched in. Cooper raises his hand in a wave; Bishop stares straight

into the camera. Bishop texted the image to Sonia, then powered down his phone to save the battery.

Within half an hour, a dirty orange glow obscured everything around them. When Cooper’s cellphone finally rang, a sheriff’s deputy asked if the men could get to water, but they could not. Seattle Mountain Rescue volunteers, part of King County Search and Rescue, arrived in the area before realizing it wasn’t safe to go after the hikers. And the next call brought worse, but unsurprising, news: No helicopter could reach them. They were on their own, surrounded by fire.

Bishop and Cooper weighed their options. Would they die if they stayed where they were and waited for the fire to pass? With no trail to follow, would they die if they left? They pored over maps on a GPS app on Bishop’s phone, searching for an escape route. They debated running through still-smoldering terrain, but decided against it. Then they spotted something: a route that might get them down the mountain, around steep cliffs and

drop-offs. Bishop and Cooper would try to rescue themselves.

IN SNOHOMISH, SONIA DROVE HOME from church, crying. At home, she huddled with friends, her teenage son, Kaleb, and their chocolate Lab, Koda. Kaleb's birthday party was that afternoon; he'd turn 15 the next day. Mason, their older son, would graduate from U.S. Army Basic Combat Training next month. Sonia wondered if her husband would live to see these milestones. She clung to the only information she had: a dot representing Bishop and Cooper's location, transmitted by the satellite phone they carried, information that Ed shared with her. The circle moved sporadically on the digital map, indicating the hikers could still be alive.

But their chances of survival looked slim. "It was a pretty bad feeling to know that I had exhausted every tool in my limited toolbox," Peter Teske, the on-call Snohomish County Search and Rescue coordinator, said about that day. "I was already planning on us having to go collect their bodies after they perished and the fire had moved on."

That morning, the gravel road to the trailhead was open, a few other cars in the lot. The skies were only tinged with smoke, which can travel hundreds, even thousands, of miles from a blaze. Looming mountains blocked the burgeoning Bolt Creek Fire from the hikers' sight. "I wouldn't say it was their fault," Phillips, the joint incident commander, said. "They were in the wrong place at the wrong time." Would-be rescuers agreed. "I don't fault those guys at all," Teske said. "There was zero indication that there was a new fire."

And the men had done a lot of things right. They're the kind of hikers who bring extra trekking poles to give to strangers with sprained ankles. They knew how to read maps, were fit enough for off-trail travel, and carried that emergency satellite phone. Bishop, who volunteered on a search and rescue team as a young adult, and Cooper, a retired member of the Navy, were poised under pressure. They kept calm.

There wasn't much more they could have done, Snohomish County Search and Rescue members said. And, given the changing climate and increasingly severe wildfires, Search and Rescue wasn't sure what else their own crew could have done, either. "I'm trying to think of a way that we could better prepare

for that eventuality, and I cannot," Sgt. Greg Sanders said. Search and rescue units won't risk the lives of their members, many of whom are volunteers, to pluck people from a wall of flames. "We will never, ever, *ever* — you can underscore that ever — knowingly send them into harm's way," Teske said.

So what does hiking in the age of fast-moving, unpredictable fires look like? Another hiker in the area that day has ideas. "Just as we add avalanche danger to trip planning during the winter, we must add wildfire danger planning during the dry months," Alison Dempsey-Hall said. She'd noticed a lone car in the trailhead parking lot as her group fled — Bishop's Jeep. In the future, she plans to check the National Weather Service for red flag warnings, issued when high temperatures, high winds and low humidity mean that wildfires can start easily and spread quickly. "If you're to be really cautious, you'd probably see that red flag warning and say, 'Hmm, I'm going to choose another route,'" she said.

A more expansive definition of recreation won't shield hikers from wildfires. But it may help better situate them in their surroundings. The Snoqualmie Tribe's Ancestral Lands Movement, for example, encourages people to protect, respect and restore the places they visit. "We're losing that sense of reciprocity and restoration," said Jaime Martin, the tribe's executive director of governmental affairs and special projects. "We need to start rethinking and reframing what recreation looks like, and bringing people into some of those activities that make landscapes more resilient." That could look like getting involved in local restoration projects, before or after wildfires sweep through.

BACK ON THE MOUNTAIN, Bishop and Cooper began moving downhill around 1 p.m., still surrounded by burning trees and smoke. The wind whipped up, pushing the fire back toward them. Flames crackled up the trees beside the gully, trying to eat them from below. So they changed directions, looking for a different route away from the danger.

They followed a dry creek bed, shinnying down ledges and walls, some of them taller than they were. But a soaring 200-foot-high cliff stopped their progress. More trees ignited and toppled, hitting the ground above them, dislodging boulders that thundered downslope.

Another pocket of cell reception dangled the possibility of rescue. The King County Sheriff's Office told them that a helicopter could reach them, if they could get to an open spot. But the hikers' location — on the border of two counties — created complications when their next call was routed to a dispatcher in Snohomish County. "I'd like to stay and talk with you, but the fire's coming down. I've gotta jam," Cooper said, his voice clipped and tense. The dispatcher asked him to wait for a supervisor, but he hung up. Eyes watering from the smoke, he and Bishop climbed back up the creek bed and continued to look for another way out.

More ledges blocked their way. The ground was covered with slippery dry pine needles, and they grabbed at brush to stay upright. Suddenly, Bishop lost his footing and began sliding toward the edge of yet another cliff. Cooper watched helplessly as his friend grabbed at a tree to stop his fall. It worked. With the crackle and pop of fire above them, they took a moment to breathe, and then kept moving. When they encountered more ledges, they used each other's shoulders and hands to create steps on the steep drop-offs.

A chute, scrubbed clean of trees but thick with thorny bushes, provided a new route to the valley below. Cooper narrated their progress to the camera; Bishop, exhausted, simply waved. Ahead, a flat area with few trees looked promising. They bushwhacked down, edging farther and farther from the flames. Every foot down in elevation brought them a step closer to gentler terrain and a path to safety.

Finally, they stumbled on a well-maintained trail among emerald foliage untouched by fire. They paused for a moment and hugged. Their throats were raw from hours in smoke without water, and they talked about their cravings — Diet Coke, water, Gatorade. They followed the trail to the parking lot, got in the Jeep and sped off, light gray smoke settling into the trees above them.

IN THE SMALL TOWN OF BARING, the tired, thirsty hikers pulled into a gas station. Residents were evacuating, and a driver with suitcases piled in the bed of his truck struck up conversation. "I think there are still hikers stranded there," he said, gesturing at the mountains. "Nope," Bishop said. "That's us." By 6 p.m., they were back at Bishop's home, eating gyros with Sonia and Kaleb, who teased

his dad about missing his birthday party that afternoon. That night, at his own home, Cooper struggled to sleep. Adrenaline still coursed through his body.

Meanwhile, the Bolt Creek Fire kept burning. It continued to race west; by nightfall, evacuation orders covered 500 homes, and the blaze had grown to 7,000 acres. “The fire never slowed down,” Phillips, the joint incident commander, said. Over the next few days, over 430 firefighting personnel streamed into the area. In the coming weeks, smoke from the Bolt Creek and other fires in the Cascades blanketed the greater Puget Sound area, including Seattle and King County.

Wildfire smoke, a mix of gases and fine particles, is dangerous, potentially deadly, to people who breathe it in, even if they are nowhere near the fire itself. Recent assessments estimate that wildfire smoke causes between 6,300 and 32,000 deaths in the U.S.

“If you’re to be really cautious, you’d probably see that red flag warning and say, ‘Hmm, I’m going to choose another route.’”

The Bolt Creek Fire point of origin, just outside Skykomish, Washington.

annually, a number that varies according to study methodology and time frame. Children, the elderly, and people who are pregnant or have pre-existing lung and heart conditions are especially vulnerable, while those who work outside, such as farmworkers, or live in housing that lets smoke in — often people of color — are more likely to be exposed.

Two in five Seattle residents are low-income, and at least 13,000 people in King County are unhoused at any given time. Resources like smoke centers, where people can escape the poor air, and homemade air filtration systems are “short-term Band-Aid solutions,” said Anjum Hajat, an epidemiology professor at the University of Washington. More permanent fixes, like adequate legal protections for workers who toil in the smoke and air purification for all homes, are still needed, said Hajat — and, of course, tackling the climate crisis by burning fewer







“One little spark and this whole place goes up. It will be a long time before I build a fire in the woods, if ever.”

Steve Cooper, left, and Matt Bishop ascend what remains of the trail up to the ridge of Baring Mountain during their return this spring (left). A burned tree on the northwest ridge of the mountain (above).

fossil fuels. In the meantime, many people are forced to inhale smoke for as long as it lingers. “Disasters only exacerbate existing social inequalities that we see in society,” said Michael Méndez, a professor who studies environmental policy and planning at the University of California-Irvine.

On Oct. 20, smoke from the Bolt Creek Fire and other blazes gave Seattle the worst air quality in the world. *Why don’t they just put out the fire?* some wondered. But the steep, inaccessible terrain where it was burning made firefighting challenging, and there are ecological benefits to letting a fire like this burn; for one thing, it reduces the chance of future, more severe fires. The blaze ultimately burned over 15,000 acres, including almost all of a 960-acre tract of timberland that the Tulalip Tribes reacquired in 2019 to protect and provide reliable access to culturally important species. But only one outbuilding was destroyed, and no one died. Rain and snow finally dampened the fire in late October. As of early July, officials had determined that the fire was human-caused, but the details were under investigation.

Hoping to educate others, Cooper published videos about the hike on YouTube. They have been viewed nearly 200,000 times; most of the comments are supportive, including posts from local search and rescue crew members, hikers and residents. Some of them learned the hikers survived only when they saw the video.

LIKE A SCAR ON A HUMAN BODY, marking where the skin is healing after an injury, a fire’s burn scar tells a tale of destruction and recovery. A charred landscape of blackened soil eventually blossoms with new plant life. But for those who survive them, fires can leave invisible scars, too.

In the weeks following the Bolt Creek Fire, Bishop and Cooper encountered other people’s campfires on backpacking trips. The sound of dry wood crackling and the smell of smoke upset Bishop: “One little spark, and this whole place goes up,” he said. “It will be a long time before I build a fire in the woods, if ever. I don’t think the benefit is worth the risk.” Cooper described feeling disconnected from his body; he had to get back outside for things to feel real again.

Smoke and wind gusts are common triggers for other wildfire survivors. “When you



haven't fully processed the trauma, anything that comes up that's related to what you went through is going to retrigger, and put them right back into the moment the initial trauma happened," said Darla Gale, a therapist who works with wildfire survivors in California. Some of her patients report difficulty sleeping and nightmares, as well as feelings of anger and guilt. Survivors also experience anxiety and depression, though therapy can help. Chronic mental health issues tend to appear six months post-fire. A 2021 study found that fire survivors suffered post-traumatic stress disorder three times more often than the general population.

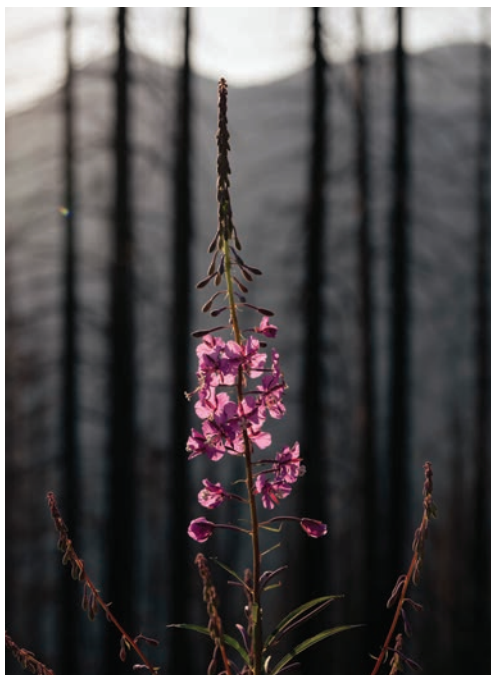
A VERDANT FOREST surrounded Bishop and Cooper when they hiked Baring Mountain last September. But nothing was the same when they returned to the ridgeline in May. There was no shade from formerly lush stands of evergreens and the sun's hot rays beamed through toothpick tree trunks. Flames had peeled back bark, revealing smooth innards the color of papaya. A lone chipmunk scurried in the dust. Ashy mud slid underfoot and loose pebbles, once hidden beneath the soft forest floor, crunched under their boots. In the distance, a sooty grouse droned its low hooting call. Bishop absorbed his scorched surroundings. "If we had been headed down a half hour earlier, we would've been dead," he said. "If we got caught in these woods, there's no way we would have been able to get out."

The men remain cautious. To avoid hiking in areas with limited escape routes later in the summer, when fire danger is greater, Bishop and Cooper hope to hike a section of the Pacific Crest Trail in early August. Recreation patterns are expected to shift in time and location as wildfires and other effects of climate change continue to alter the landscape. "You have no choice but to adapt," said Emily Wilkins, a social scientist who studies recreation and climate change for the U.S. Geological Survey in Colorado. Research in the Columbia River Gorge following the 2017 Eagle Creek Fire showed that people avoided the entire area in the year following the fire. Smoke and wildfire closures may force hikers to seek out new areas; in the Pacific Northwest, the cooler, wetter places on the coast may see a rise in visitors as a result.

Today, the once-arduous trail to crest

*"If we had been
headed down a half
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get out."*

Matt Bishop, left, and Steve Cooper on the burned-over trail to Baring Mountain during their return in May (facing). Fireweed blooming in burned forest this summer near the origin of the Bolt Creek Fire (below).



the ridgeline to Baring Mountain is nearly impassible. Trees toppled like jackstraws form a tangled maze. Bishop, wearing the same khaki hiking pants as last year, and Cooper, carrying the same black-and-white backpack, picked their way through debris to peer at the cliffs they'd scrambled down last September. "Looking at it now, I'm not sure how we did that," Cooper said. They recalled other trips they've taken since and shared comfortable silences. Whenever they touched a stump or a rock for balance, their hands came away blackened with soot.

The changed landscape could have a profound impact on the communities nestled below. Wildfires lessen soil's ability to absorb water, so bursts of precipitation can be dangerous. Thunderstorms, rapid snow-melt, atmospheric rivers or rain falling on snow can trigger debris flows: earthen rivers carrying boulders and missile-like trees that can hurt and kill people, destroy homes, block roads and cause flooding. For months after the fire, fallen trees, uprooted in loose soil, caused periodic highway closures, cutting off Skykomish residents from the closest grocery stores and doctors' offices. USGS modeling indicates that entire swaths of the mountains above the Grotto community have a high probability of sliding; residents could be at risk for the next seven years or more.

Outside Skykomish, a dirt road winds up a hillside into the mountains. Black stumps pockmark the slopes, and the wind whips dust in circles. Signs that this was once a popular hangout spot — charred metal cans and broken glass — sparkle in the sun. Fireweed and chartreuse ferns stubbornly shoot out of the ground, early markers of regeneration and regrowth. This is where the Bolt Creek Fire originated, the result of human carelessness and a parched forest, ready to burn. As Bishop and Cooper continue to grapple with how they can stay safe hiking in a wildfire-prone future, locals in the Skykomish River Valley warily eye the burned mountainsides above them and wonder what the next fire season will bring. "Anytime we get an east wind," said Maher, the ranger district employee who called in the Bolt Creek Fire, "we're on pins and needles." ❁

Editor's note: Photos from the day of the fire are courtesy of Steve Cooper and Matt Bishop.

THE MOVEMENT TO MAKE OREGON GREAT AGAIN

‘Greater Idaho’ would shift the Oregon-Idaho border westward.
White nationalists are on board.

By Leah Sottile | Illustrations by Ben Jones



IN THE 164 YEARS since Oregon became a state, many people have tried to redraw its wide rectangular boundaries. Secession movements punctuate its history, spearheaded by groups promising that by breaking away or creating new states, they would be making life better. Safer. Less infringed-upon. More free.

So far, none have succeeded.

The latest movement, Greater Idaho, seeks to slice off almost everything east of the Cascade Mountains and add it to Idaho, uniting the right-leaning portions of the Beaver State with its more conservative neighbor. Nearly two dozen people conceived the idea over pizza and soft drinks in a La Pine, Oregon, restaurant in 2019.

Organizers frame Greater Idaho as a natural byproduct of Oregon’s “urban/rural divide” — shorthand for how populous cities can sway a state’s politics. The idea is far-fetched: In order for eastern Oregon to become Idaho, Oregon’s Democratic-dominated Legislature, Idaho’s Republican-dominated Legislature and the divided United States Congress would all have to agree. Still, the campaign has gained attention, garnering articles in national media outlets; in 2021, *The Atlantic* called it “Modern America’s Most Successful Secessionist Movement.”

But less attention has been paid to its underlying motives and how they fit into the Northwest’s long history of racially motivated secessionism. Over time, Greater Idaho has slowly revealed itself to be something

of a poisoned apple: framed as a gift to discontented rural people, but actually a front for far-right culture war talking points, including racist ones.

The movement’s website and leaders echo Trumpian rhetoric about “illegals” and lambast Oregon for education programs about Black history and public health measures that prioritize communities of color. During the first year of COVID-19 restrictions, in 2020, Mike McCarter, a movement leader, told a regional website that Oregon “protects Antifa arsonists, not normal Oregonians.” He added, “It prioritizes one race above another for vaccines and program money and in the school curriculum, and it prioritizes Willamette Valley” — where Portland is located — “above rural Oregon.”

In 2021, Eric Ward, then-executive director of Western States Center, a Portland-based pro-democracy think tank, accused Greater Idaho of simply reviving what the *Oregon Capital Insider* described as a “white ethno-state dream.” The center’s advocacy arm later sponsored anti-Greater Idaho TV ads.

McCarter pushed back: “Calling us racist seems to be an attempt to associate a legitimate, grass-roots movement of rural Oregonians with Hollywood’s stereotypes of low-class, ignorant, evil, ugly, dirty Southerners,” he said in a statement posted alongside photographs of Ward and Western States Center’s board — who are all Black — and the center’s staff. “(Ward’s) words mark anyone with a Greater Idaho sign or a Greater Idaho hat as targets for violent antifa members.”



Meanwhile, prominent racists were fired up about the idea. White nationalist leader Jared Taylor touted it on his podcast: “People who live out in the continents of rural sanity, they don’t want to be governed by the people who live on those islands of urban insanity,” he said. The audio was repurposed for a video on the far-right social network Gab — where former Fox News host Tucker Carlson is considered a trusted media source and no one would get banned for posting a swastika. Users buzzed about Greater Idaho.

Articles and clips on the anti-immigrant website VDARE also promoted it. One blog post said that Greater Idaho “would free eastern Oregonians from the anti-white, totalitarian leftists who rule the state.” A video warned that Oregon “won’t protect its residents from thugs, illegal aliens, communist rioters and other undesirables.”

Because Greater Idaho is unlikely to become a reality, “people dismiss it,” said Stephen Piggott, a program director with Western States Center. And that, he believes, is dangerous: “People are not connecting the dots,” he said. “The people who want to create a white homeland are backing it.”

WHEN OREGON WAS ADMITTED to the Union, its Constitution contained a clause banning Black people from moving there — the only state with such a provision. Even before its borders were drawn, people floated the idea of creating a slave-owning haven in what is now southern Oregon and Northern California, branding it the “Territory of Jackson,” after President Andrew Jackson. Confederate sympathizers considered several of the new state’s southernmost counties “the Dixie of Oregon.” Later, in the mid-20th century, the State of Jefferson movement emerged in the same area; it nixed owning slaves, but retained a slave owner as its namesake. Driven by people who felt they were over-taxed by Oregon and California, the movement still has supporters.

The secessionist torch passed from generation to generation. The phrasing changed, but the talking points remained the same.

In 1986, after migrating from California to North Idaho to build a racist refuge for his group the Aryan Nations, white supremacist Richard Butler hosted his annual Aryan World Congress — a national gathering of neo-Nazis, racist skinheads and members of the Ku Klux Klan. They agreed that, in the not-so-distant

future, U.S. cities would become so overrun by minority groups that white people would be forced to flee to an “Aryan homeland” they envisioned in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Butler died in 2004. Eventually, his compound was fully bulldozed and his acolytes scattered, but his ideas remained and evolved. In 2011, survivalist blogger and *New York Times* best-selling novelist James Wesley, Rawles floated an idea called “The American Redoubt.” (According to the Anti-Defamation League, some individuals add errant punctuation to their names to distinguish their first and middle names from their government-imposed or family names.) He encouraged Christians of any race who felt alienated by urban progressive politics to relocate to the Northwest, writing: “I’m inviting people with the same outlook to move to the Redoubt states.” Recently, the Idaho Freedom Foundation, a right-wing political think tank,

echoed this. “Are you a refugee from California, or some other liberal playground?” it asked on its website, welcoming those newcomers as “true” Idahoans.

Starting in 2015, then-Washington state Rep. Matt Shea, R, pushed to sever his state at the Cascades, rebranding the rural eastern half as “The State of Liberty,” which advocated against same-sex marriage, marijuana and environmental regulations. Shea distributed a document calling for Old Testament biblical law to be enacted. On its website, Liberty State organizers suggest that if Liberty becomes a reality, they would be open to merging with Greater Idaho.

Within the last two years, Vincent James Foxx, a white nationalist associated with the Rise Above Movement — a group the Southern Poverty Law Center described as “an overtly racist, violent right-wing fight club” — relocated to Post Falls, Idaho. “A true, actual right-wing takeover is happening right now in



the state of Idaho,” Foxx declared.

Greater Idaho is driven by ideas similar to those behind past movements: fleeing cities, lauding traditionalist Christian values, pushing a far-right political agenda. “Ultimately, I think in some ways, Butler’s vision is coming true,” said David Neiwert, an expert on far-right extremism and the author of *The Age of Insurrection*.

What all these secessionist ideas have in common, Neiwert said, is that they are anti-democracy. Greater Idaho’s organizers “don’t really want to put up with democracy,” he said. “They don’t want to deal with the fact that if you want to have your position win in the political arena, you have to convince a bunch of people. They just want to take their ball and create a new playground.”

Gary Raney, former sheriff of Idaho’s Ada County, where Boise is located, disliked seeing his state “being advertised as an extremist haven.” In response, last year he founded Defend and Protect Idaho, a political action committee that fights political extremism. “Everybody’s entitled to their opinion, and I welcome that discourse and discussion,” he said. “But when people are wanting to overthrow our government or our republic or our democracy ... there’s nothing healthy about that.”

In 2023, the Idaho House of Representatives passed a nonbinding proposal calling for formal talks with the Oregon Legislature about moving the border, though no such talks occurred. Raney sees Greater Idaho as “driving a wedge” in rural communities, using resentment over urban power to recruit people to more extreme causes. “The good people of Oregon who are doing this for the right reasons: Be realistic that it’s never going to happen, and be more influential in the Oregon Legislature,” Raney said. “For the extremists who are simply using this to divide and create their right-wing haven?

“Stay the hell out of Idaho,” he said. “Because we don’t want you.”

BY GREATER IDAHO spokesman Matt McCaw’s telling, the movement is born out of opposites that run as deep as the land itself. “The west side of the state is urban. It’s green, it’s very left-leaning,” he said in an interview with *High Country News*. “The east side of the state is conservative, it’s rural, it’s very dry. It’s a different climate.

Greater Idaho is driven by ideas similar to those behind past secession movements: fleeing cities, lauding traditionalist Christian values, pushing a far-right political agenda.

“Give me a topic, and I can tell you that the people in Portland feel one way about it and vote one way, and the people in eastern Oregon or rural Oregon feel one way about it and vote differently,” he said. “Stereotype is a word that maybe gets a bad rap.”

To become Idahoans, McCaw explained, would mean “to have traditional values that focus on faith, freedom, individualism and tradition.” He pointed to Oregon’s liberal voting record on gun control, abortion and drug legalization. “Broadly, the people (in eastern Oregon) are very like-minded, just like broadly the people in the Portland metro area are very like-minded,” he said. “On these issues, Portland has a very distinctly different set of values than rural America.”

Speaking of differences, there are big ones between Idaho and Oregon. In rural Oregon counties, minimum wage is \$12.50; in Idaho, it’s \$7.25. Marijuana is legal in Oregon; in Idaho, possession can be punishable with jail time. In Idaho, abortion is essentially illegal; earlier this year, Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek announced the state had acquired a three-year stockpile of mifepristone, a drug used for medical abortions. While there are no detailed plans on how Greater Idaho would bridge these gaps, McCaw said that “all of these things can be worked out.”

But is he upset by the white supremacist support for Greater Idaho? “I think that the extremist thing gets overblown,” he said. “In any group, there are going to be extremists that latch on, no matter if you want them or not.”

Nella Mae Parks, an eastern Oregonian, was raised in Union County, Oregon, and runs a farm there. She doesn’t recognize Greater Idaho’s portrayal of her home. “I think it’s a bought-and-paid-for narrative about what it means to be a rural American,” she said.

On the day Parks spoke to *High Country News*, she and a dozen other eastern Oregonians had just returned home after a 12-hour round-trip drive to Salem, Oregon’s capital, in an effort to get legislators to address nitrate water pollution. In 2022, commissioners in nearby Morrow County declared a state of emergency after high levels of nitrate — which is common in fertilizer and can cause cancer and respiratory issues — were found in domestic wells.

Parks’ group came home unsure if they had accomplished anything. “The governor won’t meet with us on our issues, some of our own legislators don’t care about our issues,”

Parks said. “I can understand why people feel left behind or left out, or in other ways sort of alienated from the more urban centers of power in Oregon. I think a lot of us feel that way, regardless of our politics.

“When we get blown off, that is widening this rural/urban divide,” she said.

But Parks’ solution is not to leave the state; it’s to fix it. And in May, it seemed like the effort had been worth it: Kotek told eastern Oregon leaders that she had asked the state for \$6.2 million to address the nitrate issue. “It has taken a while to get here,” she admitted.

Gwen Trice, who grew up in eastern Oregon, is the executive director of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, a museum in Joseph dedicated to the multicultural histories of Oregon’s loggers. She won’t call Greater Idaho a movement, or even an idea. Instead, she calls it “a notion.”

Trice founded the museum when she realized that the stories of the region’s Black loggers — including her father — had never been told. The logging industry once thrived in Maxville, now a ghost town. The Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company recruited skilled loggers from the South, regardless of race, despite laws that had long excluded Black people from settling in Oregon. “We’ve worked hard to tell, honor and even embrace the messy part of our history,” she said, “and really tell a truthful story.”

Speaking as a historian, Trice said there’s no difference between Greater Idaho and the previous, more explicitly racist movements. “It’s repackaged,” she said. “I don’t think that anything is being hidden, and it’s appealing to a certain group of people only.

“It’s symbolic of dominant culture saying, ‘We know what’s better for you than you do.’”

Pauline Braymen, an 85-year-old retired rancher in Harney County, called Greater Idaho ideological, and impractical — a way of going back in time. “The urban/rural divide is an emotionally based state of mind that distorts reality,” she said. “The changes and steps forward in our quality of life in the 20th century, during my lifetime, were amazing. I just see all of that progress and vision being destroyed.

“If I wanted to live in Idaho,” she added, “I would move there.”

ON A MAP OF THE NORTHWEST, Washington and Oregon nestle together in semi-rectangular sameness. Divided in part

**“Do you really think
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by the Columbia River, Washington eases its southern border into the curve of Oregon’s north, like two spoons in a drawer. But next door, Idaho asserts itself like an index finger declaring “Aha!” or a handgun aimed at the sky for a warning shot.

McCaw, the Greater Idaho spokesman, often says that borders are imaginary lines: “a tool that we use to group similarly minded people, like-minded people, culturally similar people.”

“That whole statement is absolute nonsense,” said former Idaho State Historian Keith Petersen, who wrote a book about the borders in question, titled *Inventing Idaho: The Gem State’s Eccentric Shape*. The Idaho-Oregon border, he said, simply made the most geographical sense.

In 1857, two years before statehood, delegates from across Oregon Territory gathered to determine the new state’s edges. They decided that Oregon’s border should run from Hells Canyon south into the belly of the Snake and Owyhee rivers, then drop straight down to the 42nd Parallel. Only one delegate championed the Cascade Mountains as the new state’s easternmost edge, fearful that people too far from the capital wouldn’t be effectively represented.

“This grievance that ‘the population is over there, it’s so far to get there, we’ll never have power and influence,’” Petersen said, “hasn’t changed.”

Earlier this year, at a virtual town hall, two of eastern Oregon’s own instruments of power and influence in Salem — elected Republican lawmakers — grumbled that Greater Idaho was actually siphoning authority away from them, making it hard to effectively govern.

“The Greater Idaho people keep saying we need to do this,” said Oregon State Sen. Lynn Findley, who represents people from the Cascades to Idaho. Greater Idaho supporters have proposed ballot measures across Oregon that would force county officials to hold regular discussions about joining Idaho. None of the measures actually call for moving the border. And support hasn’t exactly been overwhelming; the most recent measure, in Wallowa County, passed by just seven votes. Still, by spring 2023, voters in 12 eastern Oregon counties had approved similar measures. “I’m no longer working on gun bills, abortion bills and other infrastructure bills,” Findley said. “It’s taken time away that I think



would be better spent working on tax issues, and a whole plethora of other stuff.”

“We understand the intent and we understand the frustration,” agreed Rep. Mark Owens. “But I’m not going to apologize for having not given up on Oregon.”

But by May, it seemed Findley was, in a way, giving up. He was one of a dozen Republican senators and one Independent who walked out of the Statehouse for several weeks to protest bills on abortion access, gender-affirming care and raising the minimum age to purchase semi-automatic rifles.

In the midst of the walkout, just before Memorial Day, as the rhododendrons in Northeast Portland erupted in magenta blooms, McCaw, in a blue suit and crisp white shirt, sat in front of a live audience at the Alberta Rose Theatre. He was participating in a public discussion hosted by Oregon Humanities, which facilitates statewide conversations “across differences of background, experience

and belief.” The event was ostensibly about borders, but by the end it was clear that it was really about Greater Idaho. McCaw repeated his talking points: Eastern Oregonians and western Oregonians are fundamentally different; borders create tension.

“We have a permanent political minority on the east side of the state,” he said.

Beside him were two other panelists, who shifted uncomfortably in their seats. One was Alexander Baretich, who designed the Cascadia flag: a blue-, white- and green-striped banner with a Douglas Fir at its center. The flag represents the larger Cascades and Columbia River Basin bioregion, “a living space — a life space,” he explained. “Once you get into that consciousness that you are interconnected with everything around you ... those political borders dissolve.”

It’s the antithesis of Greater Idaho: Cascadia unites, Greater Idaho divides. “That flag is to create that consciousness that we are

one with the planet,” Baretich said. McCaw furrowed his brow.

The moderator, Adam Davis, interjected: “I actually get viscerally uncomfortable ... when I hear, ‘There’s people on the east side are one way, people on the west side are another way.’” Tension, he said, is difficult, but crucial. “That tension holds what our democracy, if it’s going to be an inclusive democracy, kind of requires.”

McCaw said eastern Oregonians, in 2020, didn’t feel like Oregon was being inclusive when it issued statewide indoor mask mandates. It “super-charged our movement,” he said. “The people on the east side of the state did not want those restrictions.”

“I’m just going to straight-up disagree,” said the other panelist, Carina Miller, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and chair of the Columbia River Gorge Commission. Miller lives east of the Cascades on the Warm Springs Reservation, which McCaw told *High Country News* would be excluded from Greater Idaho, along with the city of Bend, because of their liberal politics.

Throughout the night, Miller repeated one phrase — “societal gaslighting.” She described growing up Indigenous in Oregon, where she received an education that normalized racist policies toward tribes, and where a boarding school built to assimilate Native youth still operates.

“To form a movement because other people aren’t feeling like they have a voice in the state, while completely disregarding this reality and how effective it’s been towards Indigenous people? That is the gaslighting part,” she said. Miller asked McCaw a question: “Do you really think that people who are advocating for Greater Idaho are the *most* disenfranchised people in these communities?”

People clapped before McCaw could respond.

“A strong majority of people in eastern Oregon do want this to move forward,” he said.

“But is the answer yes or no?” Miller pressed. “Are they the most disenfranchised?”

“I have no idea,” McCaw said.

Miller got the last word: She encouraged people to “hold onto each other and work it out.” The room erupted in applause.

McCaw didn’t join in. Instead, he sat perfectly still, his hands clasped tightly in his lap. ☀

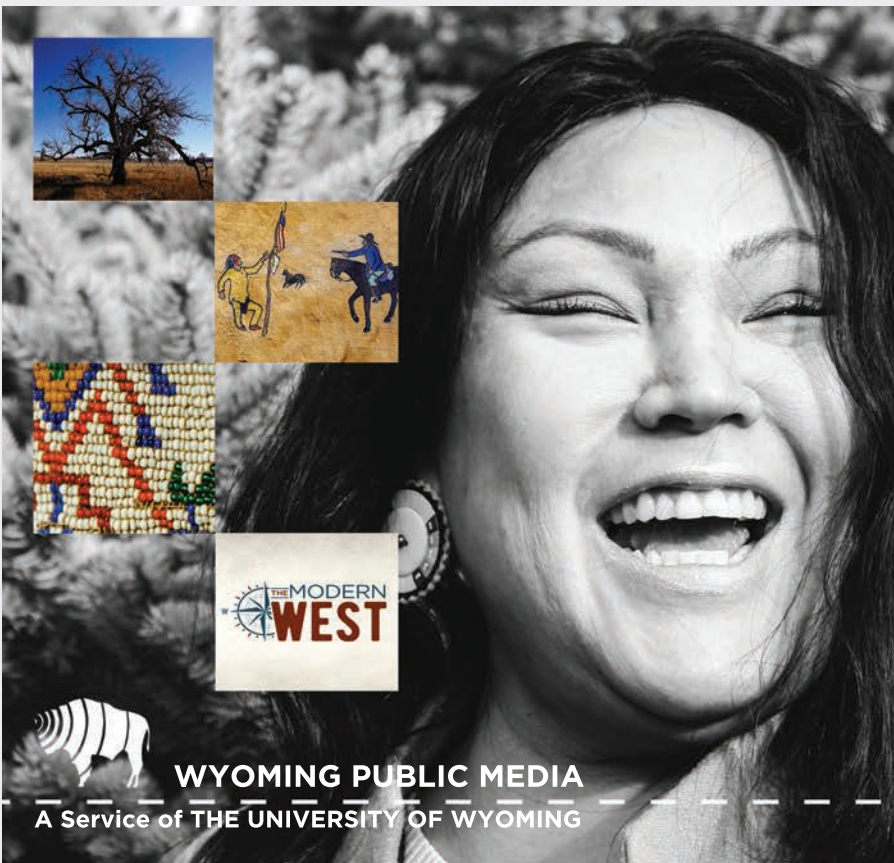


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PERSPECTIVE

Can Denver live up to its reputation as a ‘sanctuary city’?

The city’s response to migrant ‘surges’ endangers both newcomers and its long-standing unhoused population.

BY RAKSHA VASUDEVAN

SOME YEARS AGO, when I was an aid worker, I lived in Uganda, a landlocked country in East Africa. On paper, the nation was decidedly poor, with an average annual income of only \$884 per person. But it showed surprising generosity towards people in need, including people who were not technically its own. Refugees not only enjoyed the right to work, they received free plots of land to live on and farm. During my first month there, I met a Rwandan refugee. We stood on her small farm in the shadow of the Kiyembe Mountains, surrounded by rows of onions, corn, heads of cabbage. Her life had been shattered by the 1994 genocide, but Uganda gave her a chance to rebuild from the wreckage.

Maybe it should come as no surprise

that a small sub-Saharan nation treats its migrants better than America — though it wasn’t always that way, and certainly, it’s not that way across the United States. California, for example, recently became the first state to make Medicaid available to all low-income residents, regardless of immigration status. Colorado, the state I now call home, has passed multiple bills restricting its agencies, including police, from cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As an immigrant thrice over — from India to Canada as a child, Canada to Uganda as an adult, and Uganda to America as a slightly older adult — the passing of those bills represented times when I felt proud to call Denver my home. But times have changed.

Over 6,000 people from Central and South America arrived in Denver between December 2022 and April 2023. Many were fleeing economic crises, and Denver’s reputation as a “sanctuary city” seems to have drawn them here. Initially, Denver lived up to that reputation, converting recreation centers to emergency overnight shelters and providing its new arrivals with winter clothes and meals. But in April, the city announced that it would stop providing emergency shelter to undocumented people, thereby excluding a staggering 25% to 50% of newcomers.

Most likely, this decision was in anticipation of Title 42’s expiration. Widely hailed as inhumane by human rights activists, the Trump-era policy allowed immigration authorities to turn people back without even giving them a chance to apply for asylum. Its expiration was expected to (and did) lead to a spike in the number of migrants, though the numbers have since leveled off. What hasn’t changed, though, is that many migrants still enter without encountering the Department of Homeland Security — that is, without even trying to apply for asylum. Their choice makes sense: The horrific conditions in detention centers have been well-publicized, as have the hardships and violence faced by asylum seekers forced to wait in Mexico for their application to be heard. Being documented with an arrival record or an “alien number” brings its own host of fears, including that authorities aware of an immigrant’s presence can deport them for the slightest infringement.

When I moved to the U.S. on a work visa in 2016, I lived in fear of anything that might violate my standing as a “good immigrant”: a speeding ticket, an overdue bill, losing my job. The thought of not having my visa renewed and being forced to leave the country I now thought of as home was not terrifying; the idea of returning to Canada did not fill me with dread. But it was still sad. And so, the fear lived on in the back of my mind, simmering like a pot on low heat.

Now, instead of helping those fleeing situations of real terror — usually created by decades of exploitative U.S. foreign policy — Denver seems to be closing ranks, refusing to share its abundant resources with people it doesn’t consider its own. It does this even as it fails many of its long-term residents, especially those who are unhoused.

Well before the migrants sought

sanctuary, tent cities surrounded Denver's Capitol building, making a mockery of a government that claims to care for its people. It was a sight that shocked me when I first moved here. In East Africa, even the poorest had networks of family or friends to call on, sleeping in sheds or squeezing into already crowded bedrooms. Poverty existed there on a greater scale than America, but it lacked the isolation and stigma that accompanies poverty here. All of that to say: I had not seen people sleeping on the street in years.

Now, Denver's refusal to shelter undocumented migrants not only risks pushing more people into homelessness, it increases the competition for services among those already unhoused. Richard Molina, a peer navigator at St. Francis Center, a daytime shelter, said the city's decision leaves new arrivals with few options. Though individual migrants may find housing at an emergency overnight shelter, it's harder for families with children.

"It makes it a very difficult situation to tell a family, look them in the face and say sorry, I don't know where to put you," he said. "I don't know where you're going to sleep tonight."

Given all we know about migrants' torturous journeys, Denver's failure to offer them that most fundamental of human rights — the right to shelter — is simply inhumane. Though the city insists that its resources have been stretched to a breaking point, with \$17.8 million spent by early June — federal funding is only available for documented migrants — this, too, appears absurd considering Denver's wealth.

Last year, *Bloomberg* reported that Denver was "a magnet for the affluent" with "one of the hottest luxury housing markets in the country." In 2023, the city budget was \$1.66 billion, with the largest tranche — \$611 million, or 36% — designated for "public safety," mostly funding for police forces. Given the mixed outcomes of expanding police presence, it's hard not to wonder why more of this money

isn't spent on services that offer a greater — and clearer — public good: housing people who lack homes of their own, for example. If we want to keep our streets "crime free," then giving people options other than sleeping on those streets is the minimum we could do. ☀

Migrants at a makeshift shelter in Denver, Colorado, this January. In April, the city of Denver announced that it would stop providing emergency shelter to undocumented people (*facing*). **Hyoung Chang / The Denver Post via Getty Images**

Victoria Oropeza leans on her father, William, as the two migrants from Venezuela wait in line for food from a food truck at a migrant processing center this spring in Denver, Colorado. The two, along with her mother and brother, traveled for seven months to get to Denver and planned to continue to New York City (*below*). **Helen H. Richardson / The Denver Post via Getty Images**



Consoling spirits

A visit to the sacred Ireichō at the Japanese American National Museum.

BY NORIKO NAKADA | ILLUSTRATION BY TOMOKO TSUBOTA

I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN I first learned about it; it was just something in the collective of our family history, something in the air the Nakadas breathed. There were books with photos on the living room bookshelf, and Dad spoke casually about life in “camp.” Whenever his sisters and brothers were around, if there were questions about when something occurred, it was either before or after camp, this bookmark in their lives of the war and of removal. I bore witness directly from the generation who lived the experience of incarceration. But now, a generation later, I wondered how my kids would learn about this scar that marked our family and our country’s past.

Last October, I heard about a new display at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles: “The Ireichō: A Sacred Book of Names.” In a moving ceremony in late September, to the pulse of taiko drumming and Indigenous voices, the museum formally received and installed this huge and beautiful hand-sewn book, which contains the first comprehensive list of the more than 125,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated in the U.S. during World War II. For the first time, their names were all gathered on paper. Anyone can visit this sacred book, but the descendants of the formerly incarcerated were invited to honor them by stamping their names and recognizing them. I made an appointment to do so.

On a winter afternoon, my two kids, my husband, and I carved our way through LA traffic to the museum. I wished my dad was healthy enough to travel to see this. He was the last surviving member of the family, and

we were visiting the day before his 92nd birthday. But even though his parents and brothers and sisters have all passed over, we could still honor them and honor him.

We arrived early for our appointment to stamp the Ireichō. So we visited the exhibits. We stood in dilapidated barracks that had been disassembled in the Wyoming desert and brought here to Los Angeles. I was surprised it wasn’t a barracks from Manzanar, the camp at the base of the Sierra where so many from Los Angeles were incarcerated. It was quiet as we took in the spaces, the weathered wood, the emptiness. We stared at black-and-white photographs of children and families, at baseball gloves and broken toys, at the instructions to all persons of Japanese ancestry required to report. My 10-year-old asked, “If this happened today, would we be ...?”

I nodded. “Anyone who had 1/16 Japanese ancestry was removed.”

We listened to old recordings of the house committee hearing on reparations. When a Black representative spoke of his impassioned solidarity with his Asian brothers and sisters, my 7-year-old noted, “He’s on our side.”

And then we waited to stamp the Ireichō. I had submitted Dad’s name when I made my reservation, but the museum historians had located the other Nakadas. In all, there were nine: my grandparents, six of my uncles and aunties, and Dad. Dad’s four other brothers were in the military, serving in the 442nd or in special services. They weren’t in Wyoming, unless they were on leave and were able to visit their relatives at Heart Mountain. Later, they helped move the family to the Gila River

War Relocation Center in Arizona.

The docent helped us practice stamping so that we wouldn’t soil the sacred book. The kids worked to find the right pressure, not wanting to mess up the small dot of a stamp.

ONCE WE WERE READY, we walked from the resource center to the small exhibit space. We gazed up at glass jars holding soil gathered from every site where our ancestors were held. Some of the 75 cite names were familiar, the eight War Relocation Cites: Heart Mountain (Wyoming), Jerome (Arkansas), Manzanar and Tule Lake (California), Poston and Gila River (Arizona), Minidoka (Idaho) and Topaz (Utah). But other names were new to me: Greenbrier (West Virginia), Haiku Camp (Hawaii), Leupp (Arizona), Nyssa (Oregon). And others were a surprise: Griffith Park (California), Moab (Utah), Portland (Oregon).

The jars of soil took me to another honoring, another museum erected to honor the lives of so many lost to injustice. I have not yet visited the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, to honor those lost to the violence of lynching in the American South. I have not peered up at the 800 slabs of steel, one for each county, etched with the names of those lost to racial terror. Nor have I stood inside the Legacy Museum beside jars of soil from known lynching sites, each glass vessel marked with the names of known victims. But now I reminded myself that it was important for me to visit these places, to honor their names and lives, to console their spirits, and to fight for reparations for their descendants.

The docent tells us about the sacred book, its many pages, its organization by birth year, and the ceramic plates made from the soil of the different sites that are embedded inside the book. We don’t touch the book or its pages. We stare and scan the thousands of names as the docent flips through the pages.

When we are ready to stamp, we start with the eldest, my grandfather, Ginzo Nakada. We each stamp his name, just one on a page of so many. Four small stamped circles hover above his name. Then it is Kagi Nakada, my grandmother, and we stamp her name with our four dots, just one more name on another page of so many. Next is Yoshio, their oldest son. Four stamped circles. Then there is Minoru, who left camp, enlisting as soon as the government allowed it. Four stamps. James left as well,



finding a sponsor who enabled him to study in Illinois. Four more stamps. Then there is Grace, Dad's older sister, and then there is Dad, the only one whose spirit is still here, amongst the living. I stamp his name and honor him. His son-in-law and grandchildren stamp the Ireichō and console his spirit. Four more stamped circles. Finally, it is Dad's two younger siblings, Hannah and Stephen.

When we are done, we stand beside the

Ireichō for a photograph. We breathe in the presence of our family's names and the presence of all the others. The 7-year-old struggles in the gravity of the moment, but even that feels like a kind of honoring. As we stand with the ancestors to honor and console them, my children learn directly from those who lived this experience. We honor our familial and historic past, and, in honoring them, we both heal and repair. ✨

The Ireichō will be housed at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles until December. An online version of the list of names can be found at ireizo.com.

The Tractor Princess

Memories from California's Pajaro Valley.

BY KATHLEEN GUTIERREZ



ONE AFTERNOON, when she was around 12 years old, Antoinette rode a tractor through the town of Aromas, California.

Her father had told her not to use the vehicle. Men drove tractors; women carried out other farming tasks. That day, however, Antoinette ignored the social rules. Her older sister, Veronica, sometimes goaded her into mischief; the two had previously swiped the keys to a Jeep for a quick drive during a quiet moment in the fields. As Antoinette lurched over berry plots and dusty roads, she delivered a pageant wave from her seat, declaring herself, at least for that moment, the Tractor Princess.

Antoinette is one of thousands of children of the “manong generation” (*manong* means “older brother” in Tagalog/Ilokano), Filipino migrants who came to the Western Seaboard and Hawai’i to labor in plantations, canneries and service jobs in the early 20th century. When the United States colonized the Philippines in 1898, the U.S. government recruited Filipino farmers to come do the work previously done by Chinese and Japanese migrants. Discriminatory policies that choked off Chinese and Japanese migration left open thousands of agricultural jobs ready to be filled by “U.S. nationals,” the euphemism for the nation’s new colonial subjects. As U.S. nationals, Filipino farmworkers occupied a liminal legal position that simultaneously allowed them to labor in the U.S. while denying them access to the basic rights of citizens. Roughly 100,000 Filipino men — and within this figure,

a lesser number of Filipina women — established families, sprawling kin networks and enclaves along the West Coast.

The Pajaro Valley was one of those places. Located on California’s Central Coast, south-east of Santa Cruz, the valley is one of the state’s most productive agricultural regions. First home to the Ohlone people, the region saw massive land transformation under successive waves of Spanish, Mexican and U.S. incursion. A fertile plain with foothills rising to its east, the valley greets mists from Monterey Bay. It has produced cattle, grain, orchards, and tuber and root crops for over two centuries. Filipinos began arriving in the 1910s and settled in towns like Watsonville, Las Lomas, Moss Landing and Aromas.

In some respects, the history of the manong has been carefully documented. The late historian Dawn Bohulano Mabalon wrote an exceptional book on the manong of Stockton, California, titled *Little Manila is in the Heart* (2013), while Rick Baldoz’s *The Third Asiatic Invasion* (2011) offers a sobering look at the harsh legal conditions under which the manong labored and loved. In *Becoming Mexipino* (2012), Rudy Guevarra documented the stories of manong, their Mexican wives and their “Mexipino” children in San Diego. There are also novels, theater productions and other scholarly works on the topic.

Yet we know far less of children like Antoinette, members of what’s been called the “bridge generation.” They are the U.S.-born

second-generation immigrants who connect the two major migration waves from the Philippines — the manong were the first, while the second encompasses the predominantly middle-class emigres who arrived after the passage of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965. Unlike the Philippine-born farmworkers who preceded them and the professionals who followed, the bridge generation had to negotiate the complexity of their Philippine and U.S. identities between two major historical bookends.

IN FEBRUARY OF 2020, longtime Filipino community leader Dioscoro “Roy” Recio Jr., a member of the bridge generation, mounted an exhibit at the Watsonville Public Library entitled “Watsonville is in the Heart.” He wanted to celebrate local manong history, inspired by the work of Dawn Mabalon as well as by *America is in the Heart*, a 1943 novel by author Carlos Bulosan that is considered a classic in the Asian American canon. Rolling COVID-19 closures, however, abruptly ended the exhibit. Undeterred, Recio reached out to faculty and graduate students at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) to jump-start an even more ambitious project.

Launched at the end of 2020 and formalized in 2021, the university’s version of “Watsonville is in the Heart” is a campus-community research initiative, which I co-lead, that seeks to preserve the history of the manong of the Pajaro Valley. Since 2021, a team of interviewers and digital archivists has conducted

44 oral history interviews with 44 narrators and accessioned 1,140 cultural objects, images and documents to create the first digital archive that chronicles the community.

I first learned about this local history within the wider arc of Asian American studies and Filipino diaspora studies during my own early career as a professor at UCSC. My uncle by marriage had labored in the nearby fields of Salinas. I can still hear him describing his ambivalence about the Delano grape strike, his accent carrying intonations from the island of Bohol and Monterey Bay.

Sadly, the manong themselves have long passed. But members of the bridge generation have entrusted our research team with their memories, and we have been honored to hear their childhood tales of labor and leisure, suffering and jubilee. Their stories create a compelling archive, offering new angles from which to understand the social complexities of the Filipino diaspora and of agrarian life.

MANY CHILDREN OF the manong worked in agricultural fields. This included the daughters, who began laboring as kids, sometimes as young as 3.

At age 60, Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg spoke to our team during an oral history interview that included a field tour of Aromas and adjacent towns. Her first job was folding produce boxes, for which she received about 3 cents a box. “The work had been fun,” she told us. Until she grew up, and “it got a little less fun.”

The fields greeted her at the end of every school day. Like other girls, she picked the long stems of strawberry plants, filling burlap sacks with dusty hands. As their parents bent over rows of growing strawberries, their children worked and scampered around, sometimes nibbling plump fruit freshly sprayed with pesticides.

During summer, when school was out, Antoinette rose with the sun to pick green beans, tomatoes and cucumbers. When she got older, she obtained a permit to work on other farms. During the warm months, she picked raspberries; during the fall, windfall apples.

It wasn’t just piecemeal work, but entire morning shifts. “If you got to be the lucky one,” she remembered, you would “make that pot of rice at night” before others came in, a task that offered momentary reprieve from the fields.

Veronica, her sister, recalled hoeing the



soil. “I remember at 4 years old, looking at the sky because it seemed endless. You’re hoeing, the rows are endless, the sky was endless.” As she got older, she cut stalks of dill and pickled cucumbers, cut apricots at nearby plots, then packed broccoli and apples, tossing five-pound bags of produce onto conveyor belts.

Other young women’s recollections include social dances and parades that reinforced traditional gender norms. Queens and princesses were crowned in Philippine fashion, waving flags and celebrating a kind of Filipina American womanhood of the time. Women’s clubs welcomed both Filipinas and non-Filipinas, and their role as cultural arbiters was no less significant in the Pajaro Valley.

Several other young women saw their work in agricultural fields as an ever-present reality that also reinforced gendered expectations. The seemingly small tasks of picking small fallen fruits fell to girls. Teenage girls were able to lay irrigation pipes, some remembered. When older, they joined their mothers at canneries and packing plants that sealed produce for storage, shipment and long, long lives on shelves.

This made Antoinette’s afternoon defiance all the more unusual: her boredom with the day’s tasks, her curiosity and her determination to ride the tractor — a technological symbol of rugged male work. Some parents saw tractors as much too dangerous for kids; one child was killed in an accident, crushed by heavy wheels. Antoinette and Veronica could pose with the vehicle, as they did for some family photos, but their labor stayed close to the ground, off the grumbling machine.

Our public memory often traffics in heroism, honor or grief. Many associate these and their attendant emotions with the manong. Through what other lattice of emotion might we remember the hard-working girls of the bridge generation? With their help, I hope we can build the monuments in their honor that they deserve. ☀

A Filipino Fourth of July float (*facing*).

Collection of Joan Ellen Rodriguez

Mariano Fallorina Sr. and his son, Daniel “Dan” Fallorina, picking strawberries at the Reiter Berry Farm (*top*). Manong “Gasat,” Daniel “Dan,” Mariano Jr., and Mariano Sr. eat lunch in the back of a truck in the fields (*middle*). **Collection of Dan Fallorina** Paul “Skippy” Tabalan DeOcampo and his children, Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo-Lechtenberg, Veronica Hernandez and Paul Jr., sit on a tractor at the DeOcampo farm (*bottom*). **Collection of Antoinette DeOcampo Lechtenberg and Veronica Hernandez**

THE SEASONS OF UŋALAQĪQ

An exploration of living in direct relationship with the land, water, plants and animals in and around UŋalaqĪq (Unalakleet), on the west coast of what's now called Alaska.



Drake Charles and Jeffrey Charles Jr.
(both Yup'ik) catch fish along the banks
of the Baird Inlet in Mertarvik, Alaska.
Katie Basile

Subsistence abundance

Late-summer salmon fishing is about more than just food.

BY LAURELI IVANOFF

ONE LATE-SUMMER DAY, a day so hot the mosquitoes weren't flying, my brother and his wife and I traveled nine miles up the Unalakleet River to seine for humpies, or pink salmon. We laughed and hollered while pulling the net to a flat, wide bar made of perfect skipping and throwing stones at the inside of a meander. Hundreds of humpies danced in the shallow, cold river, their flapping tails and heads splashing us, the sound of gallons of muscle and slime slapping against the water filling the air.

"Hollly cooow!" I can hear my brother Fred Jay saying.

His wife, Yanni, and I stood in the ankle-deep water and pulled all the fish we could onto shore, grabbing them by the gills to throw them into our gray plastic fishing tubs. Tubs big enough to hold hundreds of fish, but just wide and deep enough for one person to carry empty, two people to carry full. Fred Jay, on the beach, started throwing some back.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"There's too many!" he called, laughing.

Yanni and I ignored what he was doing and grabbed all the fish we could, to cut, to dry, to eat throughout the year, dipped in seal oil sprinkled with salt. Our family's staple food. Our family's bread and butter.

MERRIAM WEBSTER'S online dictionary has two definitions of subsistence:

a: the minimum (as of food and shelter) necessary to support life

b: a source or means of obtaining the necessities of life

The Inuit way of life — I am Inuit — is often described as a subsistence way of life. Depending on your definition of the word, we're either just getting by, harvesting for food and shelter what we need to keep our physical bodies alive and moving, or we're living in a way that allows us to obtain the necessities. Which, I would argue, along with food, water, shelter and clothing, include community and belonging. The lifestyle nurtures a connection with the Earth and a soul-level respect and gratefulness for Her providence. Our lifestyle gives wellness.

AT THE EDGE of the water, still at the beach, we stood at our family cutting table, made of two-by-fours and plywood covered with a burlap sack, stained dark brown from the season's fish blood. Yanni and I started cutting

the fish, one by one, the slime making them slippery as we grasped their backs to keep their bodies steady. We sliced into their bellies and down their backs, carving two fillets attached at the tail, then made *tirraqs*, or angled slices, up each fillet to help the meat dry. Fred Jay got to making five temporary drying racks out of poles from cottonwood trees he cut down on the riverbank. The racks would allow the fish to drip and begin to dry before we brought them home. When he finished, he came to the cutting table with an ulu.

After a few hours of slicing, my lower back ached and my right hand was tired from gripping my ulu. Seeing 150 fish waving in the wind and knowing we still had 100 more to cut, we were relieved to see a boat approach. It was our brother-in-law, Karl, arriving to hang out and help.

"You guys must be hungry," he said, looking at the fish already on the racks and the fish still in the tubs. "I'll make you dinner." Karl got busy at the fire, cooking the Costco burgers he'd brought. As soon as they were done, we ate them, enjoying the momentary rest, enjoying the sunlight drying our hands and the bits of slime on our T-shirts, and enjoying the company.

Then all four of us grabbed our ulus and continued cutting, late into the night.

THE DAY BEFORE I was born, my mom was waiting in Anchorage with a swollen belly, missing my brother, who was 4 years old and had stayed behind in Unalakleet with my dad. On that day, Oct. 10, 1978, an Alaska statute prioritizing subsistence use of fish and wildlife over "other uses of any harvestable surplus of a fish or game population" went into effect. Gov. Jay Hammond, whom Fred Jay is named after, had signed the subsistence bill into law three months earlier.

Later, when I was 2, Jimmy Carter signed the federal Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act on my sister's 9th birthday. It included language that gave subsistence harvesting of the salmon spawning in Alaska's rivers and the moose, caribou and other game roaming Alaska's lands priority over commercial or sport fishing and hunting.

AFTER A FULL DAY of cutting fish, Fred Jay drove us home, our tubs now filled with semi-dried fillets that we'd hang on the fish rack outside of his house. Every time we drive home, whether it's after harvesting ugruk, cutting fish,

or moose hunting, the lightness of being hits me. I feel it in my belly first. Soft. From there it branches out and touches every part of my body until each cell seems to shine with joy. From honest work. From thankfulness for each person in the boat. And from gratitude for the waters that have given for generations.

JUST 90 MILES EAST of us is the community of Kaltag. My friend Erica lives there. A few years ago, I would travel there every March as a reporter, to interview Iditarod dog mushers. While bundled up and waiting for the mushers to arrive, I'd stand around with Erica and some of her family members. During one visit, one of her relatives ran home and returned to the dog lot with a jar of Yukon River smoked king salmon strips. He handed it to me. And I felt that lightness of being. Knowing how much his family worked to make this tidy jar. Knowing that Yukon salmon were richer than our salmon on the Unalakleet, because of how big and long that river is and how far those fish had to travel upriver to spawn. Knowing that if humpies were our bread and butter, smoked king salmon was better than even wagyu beef, the best you can get.

This year, as we're putting salmon away, I've thought about Erica's family. In 2021, 2022 and again this year, subsistence salmon fishing was closed on the Yukon River due to low returns. People living along the river are left standing at the banks and cannot keep a single king, chum or coho salmon.

Yet millions of salmon are harvested in the ocean, before they return to our rivers. In 2021 and 2022, 24,238 king salmon and 795,967 chum were caught as bycatch in Alaska's federal ocean waters, meaning they ended up in nets intended for other species of fish, primarily in the commercial pollock fishery. In those same years, the state of Alaska's Area M commercial fishery, which intercepts salmon bound for the Arctic, Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, harvested 394.5 million salmon.

Commercial salmon overharvest in federal and state fisheries is cultural genocide masked as management, yet it's my friend Erica who would be prosecuted if she harvests just one king, chum or coho salmon for her family. In breaking away from the spirit of state and federal laws, fisheries managers are taking away so much more than food. ☼

CALIFORNIA

Orcas are in the news these days, with some attacking yachts off the coast of Spain. But Western orcas have also been busy, with one pod bringing bucket-list-brand delight to whale-watchers in the Pacific. The lucky folks aboard a Monterey Bay Whale Watch tour encountered 30 orcas who were apparently working off the calories following a lavish sea lion buffet. “It was pure energy and celebration,” Morgan Quimby of Monterey Bay Whale Watch told KTVU. Drone footage showed whales leaping into the air, spraying water from their blowholes and playfully high-fiving the sea with their tails. And *SFGate* reported another large gathering — 24 orcas, spotted by the Oceanic Society near the Farallon Islands. So far, anyhow, California’s orcas, unlike their Atlantic cousins, don’t appear to be organizing any boat-bashing badassery. Responses to the Atlantic orcas’ shenanigans are circulating on social media, with many observers cheering them on. As @DrBlackDeer posted: “The excitement y’all feel about the whales here lately is the same excitement we feel as Natives when buffalo start tossing tourists, like welcome to the Land Back movement.”

WYOMING

Large groups of whales are wonderfully photogenic; gigantic hordes of crickets, now, are something else entirely. *Cowboy State Daily* reports that the “creepy” critters are giving folks the “heebie-jeebies” in Edgerton, Wyoming, which has been invaded by them. The crickety confab is being compared to “something out of a horror movie — or the Bible.” The crickets (*Anabrus simplex*; also called Mormon crickets, though as far as we know, they’re lapsed) are

swarming Edgerton’s streets, highway and homes by the thousands — no, by the *millions* — and creating some serious problems: Driving gets dodgy because the squishy bug guts make roads super-slick. “It’s like driving on ice,” said Travis Anderson, who works for the town of Edgerton. The crickets have also invaded Elko, Nevada, *KUTV* reported. Elko resident Colette Reynolds summed it up: “It’s bugging me, it’s really bugging me.” The crickets are cannibalistic and greedily gobble each other, dead or alive. But other than that — and the traffic hazards, and the smelly decaying carcasses everywhere — they’re basically harmless.

CALIFORNIA

Fox5SanDiego.com reported that a popular San Diego DJ, Randy “R Dub!” Williams, has founded his own micronation, the “Republic of Slowjamastan,” on 11.07 acres of desert in Imperial County about 100 miles from San Diego. As “Sultan” and “Supreme Leader,” Williams runs everything: Crocs (the footwear, not the reptiles) are prohibited; and biting into string cheese, “mumble rap” music, and driving in the left passing lane, unless you’re actually passing, are all forbidden. Williams has big plans for Slowjamastan, including an armadillo farm and an all-you-can-eat Mongolian BBQ restaurant. But no crickets — yet.



Heard Around the West

Tips about Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write heard@hcn.org.

BY TIFFANY MIDGE | ILLUSTRATION BY ARMANDO VEVE

WYOMING

Here’s another story from the *Cowboy State Daily*. Roadside attractions make road trips memorable, adding a dash of whimsy to the vacay photos, whether it’s Boise’s Big Idaho Potato Hotel or the World’s Largest Pistachio® in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Such attractions are as iconic as the Grand Tetons or Devils Tower, although some critics consider them aesthetically offensive. Take the Big Boy hamburger statue outside of Wapiti, near Yellowstone National Park’s East Entrance. The Wapiti Big Boy appears out of his element, albeit cheerfully so. But what on Earth is he doing here? The statue’s owner, James Geier, said: “I heard people say it just showed up, like Easter Island, and nobody knows how it got there.” But Geier knows Big Boy’s true origin because he’s the one who installed it, in 2013, and now maintains it for all to see. The cute little guy — rescued from an authentic California Big Boy restaurant — seems harmless enough; he lacks that Ronald McDonald “scary clown” vibe.

WASHINGTON

If 24-hour polka music and all-you-can-eat Wiener schnitzel isn’t enough to thrill you, hold on to your lederhosen, because Leavenworth, a quaint Bavarian-themed town in the North Cascades, has added a roller coaster. The Leavenworth Adventure Park’s new Tumwater Twister Alpine Coaster boasts a 2,700-foot track and a vertical drop of 234 feet, and cruises up to 27 mph, *The Wenatchee World* reported. Diana Thronsen, 75, was one of the first to try it: “It’s really fun and really scary with terrific views of Wenatchee River and the whole valley. When I wasn’t screaming, it was beautiful.” Which sounds to us like the perfect motto for this column. ☀

Summer Reading with HIGH COUNTRY NEWS

THE SUMMER READING CHALLENGE IS UNDERWAY:
FIND OUT HOW TO PLAY AND FOLLOW ALONG AT READING.HCN.ORG.



COMMUNITY PICKS

Jane Cates, of Littleton, Colorado, submitted *The River* by Peter Heller for a very on-the-nose pick for **Step 6: Read a book whose protagonist is a river.**

Heather, of Salem, Oregon, submitted *How Far the Light Reaches* by Sabrina Emblar for a read full of spooky sea creatures for **Step 8: Read a book about a species you think is ugly or scary.**

Sue House, of Portland, Oregon, recommends *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko for **Step 3: Read a book that is a collaboration with the dead**, while Mel also recommends Leslie Marmon Silko for Step 3 — but *Almanac of the Dead*, instead.

Shoutout to Jane Cates, who as of this writing has already submitted picks for seven of the challenge's nine prompts!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Ben Goldfarb, August 31

HCN Contributing Editor Ben Goldfarb's latest book, *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet*, looks at the ways roads have impacted wildlife. It's more than just roadkill. Roads interrupt migrations, contaminate waterways, spread invasive species and even chase away songbirds through traffic noise, but the new science of road ecology is also researching solutions. Join us on Thursday, Aug. 31, as we chat with Ben about his new book.

See all the upcoming reading events this summer at reading.hcn.org.



RE-IMAGINING HISTORICAL MARKERS

Step 7 in the Summer Reading Challenge — written by Michelle Nijhuis — says “stop to read a historical marker” and offers bonus points for writing an alternative version.

Paul Pennington got in touch to share the Longfellow School historical marker in Durango, Colorado, which features a photo of a group of Southern Utes in front of the school and reads, in part, “When their reservation was opened to settlement, the Southern Utes took individual allotments, while the Ute Mountain Utes retained a tribal reservation.”



Courtesy of the La Plata County Historical Society

“My reinterpretation of this event is what one might think,” Paul wrote. “The Utes were being acculturated by the United States government.”

Have you stopped to read — and possibly re-imagine — a historical marker? Send your version to dearfriends@hcn.org. Or, you can submit your historical marker along with all your book picks at reading.hcn.org. Krystal from Seattle submitted the Blewett Historical Marker on Washington's State Highway 97, which marks the site where a gold-mining boomtown once sat.

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#IAM THE WEST

TONIA TEWELL

**Founder of Holding Out Help,
which supports people that leave
polygamous communities
Salt Lake City, Utah**

There is no free choice in most polygamous communities. I didn't grow up in polygamy, but what prepared me to run Holding Out Hope was my abusive childhood. At 12, I had total strangers take me in and raise me. They were religious but loved me without religious expectations, and that helped me understand the importance of not pushing your beliefs onto someone else. I learned quickly — by having people in my home who came from religious abuse — that if you bring up God and they sense an ulterior motive, they will run 100 mph in the other direction. You need to create a neutral safe place so they can figure out who they are and what they believe. It's really about unconditional love. Where they came from, love will always have strings attached.

Do you know a Westerner with a great story?
Let us know on social:

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Lindsay D'Addato / HCN